

The Telegraph



BOLLY PLEDGES

What we want to see and not see in tinsel town t2

THE TELEGRAPH WISHES ITS READERS
HAPPY NEW YEAR

EYE ON 2025

Will Neeraj be able to recreate his magic? P15



32 PAGES

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In Male, India's 'Coup d'Retreat'

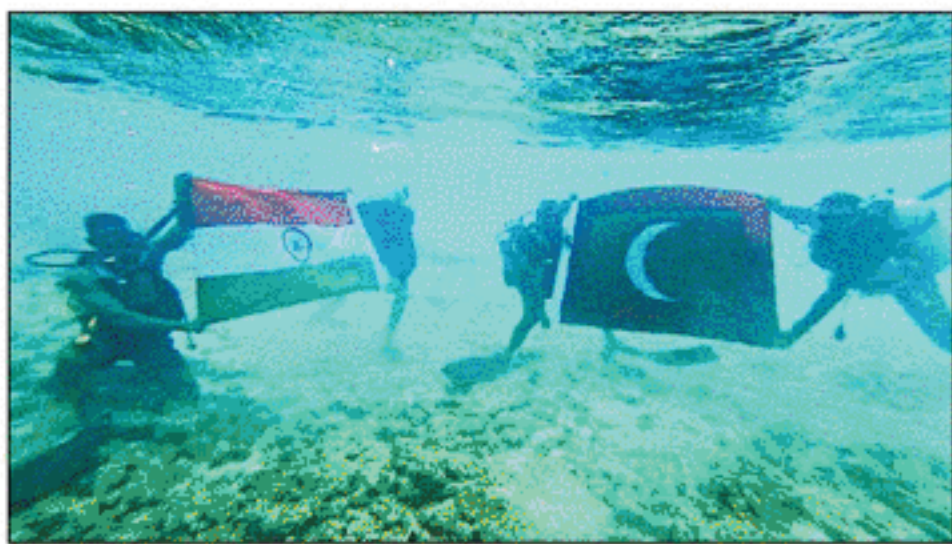
ANITA JOSHUA

New Delhi: India had conspired with the Maldivian Opposition to oust President Mohamed Muizzu, elected in September 2023 on an "India Out" plank, a report in *The Washington Post* has claimed.

The plan, according to the American newspaper, was abandoned after a few months as not enough Maldivian legislators were willing to join the effort to impeach Muizzu, who had asked India to withdraw its soldiers from the archipelago on his first day in office in November 2023.

The external affairs ministry had not commented on the report in the 24 hours since it had been out. *The Telegraph* has not independently verified the report.

In any case, by May 2024, the bilateral relationship was back on track after India extended budgetary support to the Maldives with the rollover of the \$50-million Treasury



Personnel from the Indian Coast Guard and the Maldives National Defence Force during a joint diving exercise to mark a goodwill visit by two ICG ships to the island nation on December 18. (PTI)

Bill for another year on a request from Male.

Agents working at the behest of India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), had in January begun quietly discussing with Maldivian Opposition leaders the possibility of removing Muizzu, the *Post* report says quoting people purportedly involved in the alleged discussions.

"And within weeks, a plan emerged," the report says.

"In an internal document titled 'Democratic Renewal Initiative' and obtained by *The Washington Post*, Maldivian opposition politicians proposed bribing 40 members of parliament, including those from Muizzu's own party, to vote to impeach him," it adds.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►

TIHAR NEW YEAR OFFER: FREE SALON SERVICE

Beauty lies in the eyes of the holder

IMRAN AHMED SIDDIQUI

New Delhi: From mid-morning, the beauty parlour comes alive, the bustle busier than usual and the queues longer. But the women don't mind the wait — they have nowhere else to go.

They are inmates of the women's jail in Tihar, making the most of the authorities' offer to get a spruce-up free of charge for New Year's Eve, to be celebrated perhaps with a bit of singing and dancing.

Services at the beauty parlour, located inside the high walls of the women's prison — Jail No. 6 — range from haircuts, threading and spa sessions to pedicures, manicures, facials and nail polishing.

Jail sources said the beauty parlour remains open from 10am to 2pm every day of the year, the services coming at a charge except for the current New



The beauty parlour at Tihar

Year's Eve offer.

"This offer is limited to a week. The idea is to break the monotony of prison life and allow the women a chance to pamper themselves," a jail warden said.

At the parlour, a pedicure costs just ₹40, a spa session ₹150, a facial ₹80 and threading ₹25. The market rates are up to 10 times higher.

The parlour, the warden said, is run by inmates trained by professionals from Godrej Consumer Products Ltd and Habibs Hair Academy. The training includes modern hairstyling and other beauty therapies, and is imparted as part of a rehab programme to equip the women for a new

life after release.

Those who complete the course are given a certificate — but without mentioning the place of training, to help them escape any stigma and secure jobs after release.

The beauty parlour is well-furnished and air-conditioned with plush velvet armchairs, sleek tables and wooden chairs for customers. Photos of Madhuri Dixit, Aishwarya Rai and Kareena Kapoor liven up its walls.

"The parlour is the most happening and noisiest place inside the women's jail. Who doesn't want to look good?" a prison official said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►

Mr & Mrs Split: Jolie and Pitt are divorced

Los Angeles: Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have reached a divorce settlement, apparently ending one of the longest and most contentious divorces in Hollywood history.

Jolie and Pitt signed off on a default declaration filed in Los Angeles Superior Court on Monday, saying they have entered into a written agreement on their marital and property rights. The settlement was first reported by *People* magazine.

"More than eight years ago, Angelina filed for divorce from Mr Pitt," Jolie's attorney, James Simon, said in a statement.

"She and the children left all of the properties they had shared with Mr Pitt, and since that time she has focused on finding peace and healing for their family. This is just one part of a long ongoing process that started eight years ago. Frankly, Angelina is exhausted, but she is relieved this one part is over."

The filing says they give up the right to any future spousal financial support, but gives no



Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie at the AFI Awards in California on January 9, 2015. (Reuters file picture)

other details. A judge will need to sign off on the agreement.

An email late Monday night to Pitt's attorney seeking comment was not immediately answered.

Jolie, 49, and Pitt, 61, popularly called Brangelina, were among Hollywood's most prominent pairings for 12 years, two of them as a married couple. The Oscar winners have six children together.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 ►

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The man who showed S Korea crash to world

SU-HYUN LEE

Seoul: On the morning that the ill-fated Jeju Air flight was headed to its destination in southwestern South Korea, Lee Geun-young was near the airport, getting ready to open a restaurant serving mud-flat octopus, a local delicacy.

Half an hour later, Lee shot videos that were among the first the world saw of the Jeju Air Flight 7C2216 crash that killed all but two of the 181 people on board. In an interview with *The New York Times*, he talked about the challenge of dealing with the shock of what he had seen.

Lee's restaurant, along a road about 330 yards from Muan International Airport where the plane was about to land, has a clear view of the southern end of the runway, close to the water. Lee, 48, recalled that it was a sunny morning and that he had seen birds at a nearby beach.

'Something wrong'

Around 8.57am, I heard bangs. They sounded like incomplete combustion from motorbikes but louder and unfamiliar... I left my kitchen and went outside to the restaurant parking lot and looked up at the sky. I saw the airplane. It was above my restaurant instead of over the runway. And the plane was tilted a bit to the right. It looked to me like the plane was about

to make a landing, only towards my restaurant rather than toward the runway... I went to the back of my restaurant to watch the back of the plane. The plane was higher in the sky than when I watched it earlier, and as it ascended, it was making a circle toward the right, doing a U-turn. It felt like this circle was a really small one. I felt that there was something definitely wrong with this plane and that I should take a video. That's why I walked up to the rooftop... shot the first video.

One or two seconds after the crash, I felt a sudden rush of heat on my face like you would when you opened the door to a sauna. "Do I need to get out of here?" I thought.

I saw two or three residual blasts during this time. The first blast was so big that I could see fragments spurring... when the smaller blasts occurred, I only saw smoke and flames... the firefighter trucks couldn't go near the site. They spread the water from about 100 to 130 feet away.

'I choke up'

I couldn't sleep last night. Every time I closed my eyes, I kept seeing afterimages of the blast from the crash... Every time I go on the internet and see the news of the plane crash or related footage, I choke up.

New York Times News Service

China 'hacks' US treasury department

ANA SWANSON AND DAVID E. SANGER

Washington: One of China's intelligence agencies hacked the US treasury department, gaining access to the workstations of government employees and unclassified documents, the Biden administration said on Monday, the latest in a series of embarrassing surveillance operations against major US institutions.

It was unclear from the treasury's limited first account of the episode exactly what the hackers were seeking. But senior officials with access to the intelligence on the breach said that it appeared to be entirely an espionage operation and not part of other Chinese efforts to insert malicious computer code into utility grids and water supply systems, giving them the capability to shut off critical American infrastructure.

In a letter informing lawmakers of the episode, the treasury department said it had been notified on December 8 by a third-party software service company, BeyondTrust, that the hacker had obtained a security key that allowed it to gain remote access to certain treasury workstations and documents on them.

On Tuesday, a spokesperson for China's foreign ministry, Mao Ning, called the allegation by the US "groundless".

New York Times News Service

Foreign fighters in Syria army

Damascus: Syria's new rulers have installed some foreign fighters including Uyghurs, a Jordanian and a Turk in the country's armed forces as Damascus tries to shape a patchwork of rebel groups into a professional military, two Syrian sources said.

The move to give official roles, including senior ones, to several jihadists may alarm some foreign governments and Syrian citizens fearful about the new administration's intentions, despite its pledges not to export Islamic revolution and to rule with tolerance towards Syria's large minority groups.

A Syrian government spokesperson did not reply to a request for comment on the thinking behind the appointments.

The sources said that out of a total of almost 50 military roles announced by the defence ministry on Sunday, at least six had gone to foreigners.

Reuters was not able to independently verify the nationalities of the individuals appointed.

Thousands of Sunni Muslim foreigners joined Syria's rebels early in the 13-year civil war to fight against the rule of Bashar al-Assad and the Iran-backed Shi'ite militias who supported him, giving the conflict a sectarian overtone.

Some foreign fighters formed their own armed groups while others joined established formations such as Islamic State as it rampaged across Iraq and Syria, briefly declaring a so-called caliphate before being routed by US and Iran-backed forces.

Other groups of foreign jihadists joined Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which disavowed previous links to al Qaeda and Islamic State and fought bloody battles against them before going on to spearhead the lightning advance that toppled Assad on December 8.

Ahmed al-Sharaa, the HTS-leader-turned de facto ruler of Syria, has purged dozens of foreign jihadi fighters as part of a campaign to Syrianise and moderate his group.

In remarks broadcast on Sunday, Sharaa said the new Syria "cannot be run by the mentality of groups and militias".

Syria's new rulers, drawn mainly from HTS, have indicated that foreign fighters and their families may be given Syrian citizenship and be allowed to stay in the country because of their contributions to the fight against Assad.

The defence ministry on Sunday announced 49 appointments to the army that included leaders of key Syrian armed factions.

Among them were several foreign fighters, three given the rank of brigadier-general and at least three others the rank of colonel, a Syrian military source said.

"This is a small token of recognition for the sacrifices Islamist jihadists gave to our struggle for freedom from Assad's oppression," an HTS source said. Reuters



A nun practises before her performance during the reopening of the nunnery in Kathmandu on Monday. (Reuters)

Kung fu nunnery back in Nepal

Kathmandu: About a dozen nuns performed hand chops and high kicks, some of them wielding swords, as they showed off their martial art skills to hundreds of cheering wellwishers at the long-awaited reopening of their nunnery in Nepal.

The nuns of the hill-top Druk Amitabha Monastery, put on the show of strength to mark the institution's reopening five years after the Covid-19 pandemic forced it to close its doors to the public.

The group of kung fu nuns, aged from 17 to 30, are members of the 1,000 year-old Drukpa lineage, which gives nuns equal status as monks and is the only female order in the patriarchal Buddhist monastic system.

Usually, nuns are expected to cook and clean and are not allowed to practise any form of martial art. But Gyalwang Drukpa, a monk who ranks only slightly below the Dalai Lama in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy, decided to train women in kung fu to improve their health and spiritual well-being.

He opened the nunnery in 2009 and it now has 300 members aged between six and 54.

"We do kung fu to keep ourselves mentally and physically fit, and our aim is to promote women's empowerment and gender equality," said Jigme Jangchub Chosdon, 23, a nun who is originally from Ladakh in India.

The nuns come from Bhutan, India and Nepal and are all trained in kung fu, the Chinese martial art for self-defence and strength.

"With the confidence from kung fu, I really want to help the community, young girls to build their own strength," said 24-year-old Jigme Yangchen Gamo, a nun from Ramechhap in Nepal.

The nunnery's website says that the combination of gender equality, physical strength and respect for all living things represents the order's return to its "true spiritual roots".

Jigme Konchok Lhamo, 30, from India, said her main goal was to achieve enlightenment like Lord Buddha, who founded Buddhism 2,600 years ago.

"But for now as I am a normal person... I think I will be focusing more on helping others," she said. "Helping others is our religion." Reuters

Bangla students to bury 'Mujibist Constitution' Govt joins 'proclaim' bandwagon

Dhaka: The interim government in Bangladesh has announced that it will prepare a "proclamation of July uprising", a day after it distanced itself from a proposed declaration with an identical title by the anti-discrimination students movement that led to the ouster of then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina four months ago.

"We hope within a few days the proclamation will be prepared with the participation and consensus of all and presented before the nation," Shafiqul Alam, media secretary to the chief adviser of the interim government of Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus, said in a midnight news conference on Monday.

Addressing reporters in front of Yunus's official residence, Jamuna, Alam said the declaration would be based on the views of all participating students, political parties and stakeholders, including the anti-discrimination students movement that led to the ouster of Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5.

Alam said the government took the initiative to prepare the proposed charter to "consolidate the people's unity, anti-fascist spirit and desire for state reform developed through the July uprising".

The anti-discrimination students movement along with the National Citizens Committee, another grouping led by the students, two days ago in a surprise development said it would announce the proclamation of the July uprising on Tuesday afternoon at Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar.

However, the students' platform hurriedly called an emergency meeting around 1.30am on Tuesday and told the media that instead of the proclamation they would rather stage a "march for unity" at the same venue and time.

"The Mujibist '72 Constitution will be buried (in the proclamation) in the very place where the one-point declaration was made during the July uprising," the platform's convener Hasnat Abdullah told the media on December 29.

Abdullah at that time said that "Indian aggression was initiated through the principles of the 1972 Constitution (and) the proclamation will make it clear how the Mujibist Constitution destroyed the aspirations of the people and exactly how we want to replace it".

The platform leader said the proclamation was



The Students Against Discrimination group holds the March for Unity rally in Dhaka on Tuesday. (Reuters)

expected to declare "irrelevant" the deposed premier's "Nazi Awami League" in Bangladesh as well.

The 1972 Constitution was framed a year after the emergence of independent Bangladesh by representatives elected in the 1970 elections in line with their "mandate" as "Constituent Assembly" members with Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gaining an absolute majority.

However, Pakistan's then military junta under General Yahya Khan eventually launched a sudden army crackdown leading to the Liberation War.

The interim government visibly distanced itself from the "proclamation" with Yunus's media secretary saying "the government has nothing to do with it" and "wants to see it (proclamation) as 'private initiative'".

But some leaders of ex-premier Khaleda Zia's BNP sharply reacted to the proposal with its highest policy-making standing committee member Mirza Abbas saying the Constitution was written in 1972 at the cost of the blood of three million martyrs.

"As your seniors, we feel disappointed when you (student movement leaders) say the Constitution should be buried. If there is anything bad in the Constitution, it can be amended," he told reporters.

Yunus tribute to Singh

Muhammad Yunus on Tuesday visited India's High Commission in Dhaka and paid tribute to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

"Professor Yunus visited the Indian High Commission in Dhaka and placed a floral wreath at the portrait of the late Indian Prime Minister. He also wrote a message in the condolence book opened at the High Commission," the chief adviser's media wing said in a statement. PTI

Mr & Mrs Split: Jolie and Pitt are divorced

FROM PAGE 1

Jolie filed for divorce in 2016, after a private jet flight from Europe during which she said Pitt was abusive towards her and their children. The FBI and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services investigated Pitt's actions on the flight and deemed no action needed to be taken against him.

A judge in 2019 declared them divorced and single, but the splitting of assets and child custody needed to be separately settled.

Soon after, a private judge that the two had hired to handle the case reached a decision that included equal custody of their children, but Jolie filed to have him removed from the case over an unreported conflict of interest. An appeals court agreed, the judge was removed, and the couple had to start the process over.

During the long divorce fight, four of the couple's six children became adults, negating the need for a custody agreement for them. The only two that remain minors are 16-year-old twins Knox and Vivienne. In June, one of their daughters, then known as Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt, successfully petitioned to remove Pitt's name from hers.

Their other children are 23-year-old Maddox, 21-year-old Pax and 19-year-old Zahara. The couple's use of the private judge — an increasingly common move among splitting celebrities in recent years — has kept the proceedings and details of the divorce largely

under wraps. There have been no official court actions in the case in nearly a year, and no indication that the two had been nearing an agreement.

Some elements of their disputes, however, have been revealed through a separate lawsuit filed by Pitt over Jolie's sale of her half of a French winery the two owned together. Pitt had wanted to buy her half of the winery, Chateau Miraval, and said she abandoned their negotiations and sold her part to the Tenute del Mondo wine group, a subsidiary of the Stoli Group. Pitt said it was a "vindictive" and "unlawful" move that should not have been made without his consent and ruined a private space that had been a second home.

Jolie's attorneys said that Pitt had demanded she sign a

wide-ranging non-disclosure agreement about him as part of the proposed deal. In court documents, she called that an attempt to cover up his physical abuse of her, which she said turned towards the children on the 2016 flight.

Along with the federal and LA County officials, the initial judge in the case heard testimony on the allegations before deciding to give Pitt equal custody of the children.

The divorce agreement does not affect the winery lawsuit, where the legal battle between the two stars could continue.

Publicly, both Pitt and Jolie have been extremely tight-lipped on everything surrounding their split, despite robust promotional tours and many media appearances for various projects.

Pitt said in a 2017 interview with *GQ* that he had had a drinking problem at the time of the plane incident and the split, but had since become sober and was going to therapy. He has not defended his behaviour on the family flight.

Jolie has also declined to make any public statements about the family issues or the divorce, though she has sought a broader examination and

airing of his behaviour by the courts in both the divorce and winery cases.

Both were among the most elite stars in film when they began dating in 2004, after co-starring as hitman-and-hit-woman spouses in *Mr and Mrs Smith*, and remained atop the Hollywood A-list throughout their coupling. The daughter of Hollywood luminary Jon Voight and the star of *Maleficent* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, Jolie won an Oscar for her performance in 1999's *Girl, Interrupted*.

Pitt, the star of *Fight Club* and *Inglourious Basterds*, thrived as both actor and producer after the split. He won his own Academy Award for 2019's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, the crowning achievement in an awards season that some in the media framed as a redemption and brought major public affection for him.

Jolie kept a less visible profile in the years since the divorce, though she directed several films and appeared in several more while trying to focus on raising the children. She has very much returned to the Oscar conversation this year for her portrayal of the legendary soprano Maria Callas in *Maria*. AP



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'Whatever happened has happened'

Salt to wound: CM now wants to say sorry



A displaced Kuki family at a relief camp in Manipur's Churachandpur district on July 24 last year. (Reuters picture)

UMANAND JAISWAL

Guwahati: Too little, too late has hardly ever had a more cruel ring to it.

Manipur chief minister N. Biren Singh on Tuesday apologised to the people of his state for the ongoing strife and urged all communities to "forgive and forget past mistakes" and coexist peacefully.

Addressing reporters at the chief minister's bungalow in Imphal, Singh hoped that peace would be restored in 2025 and asserted that dialogue and discussions were the only way to restore normalcy.

The ongoing conflict between the Meiteis and the Kuki-Zos has killed at least 260 people and displaced over 60,000. Massive deployment of central forces has failed to prevent flare-ups between the two communities, so riven that the valley is out of bounds for the Kukis while the Meiteis cannot enter the hills.

BJP leader Singh, who has been chief minister since 2017, said: "The entire year has been very unfortunate.... I want to say sorry to the people of the state for what's happening till today, since last May 3 (2023). Many people lost their loved ones. Many people left their homes. I really regret it. I would like to apologise..."

He added: "But now, after seeing the last three-four months' progress towards peace, I hope... that normalcy and peace will be restored in the state in 2025."

"I want to tell all communities of the state that whatever happened has happened. We have to forgive and forget the past mistakes and we have to start a new life (for) a peaceful Manipur, a prosperous Manipur living with all the recognised 34-35 tribes together. We should live together too in the future."

Responding to a media query, Singh said that of all the looted weapons, 2,112 arms had been recovered and 2,511 explosives seized along with 35,000 rounds of ammunition.

Over 6,000 arms and around six lakh ammunition were looted from police stations/armouries by mobs after the conflict erupted.

Singh said 625 people had



Women stage a protest at Leimakhong in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on November 30. (PTI picture)

been arrested and 12,247 FIRs registered so far.

Claiming "good progress" in tackling law-and-order issues, the chief minister praised the Centre for providing "enough" security personnel and funds to build homes for the displaced families.

Singh also announced a hike in dearness allowance (DA) for government employees to 39 per cent from 32 per cent with effect from January 1 and the introduction of additional flights for a year on the Imphal-Guwahati, Imphal-Calcutta and Imphal-Dimapur routes from January.

"The ticket price will be kept under ₹5,000 and the government will bear the excess amount if the price exceeds the stated amount," he said.

He also announced the launch of Aadhaar-linked birth registration in three districts of the state soon.

Highway blockade

The last day of the year saw the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU) declare an indefinite economic blockade of NH2 from 4pm following the government's inability to meet its demand for the withdrawal of central forces from Saibol in Kuki-Zo majority Kangpokpi district.

Earlier in the day, several Kuki-Zo women were injured during a protest demanding the removal of the armed forces. Security forces used tear gas to disperse the protesters, leaving at least three critically injured, reports from Kangpokpi said.

State accounted for 77% of NE unrest: Centre

IMRAN AHMED SIDDIQUI

New Delhi: Manipur, which has been witnessing ethnic unrest for the past 20 months between the majority Meitei and tribal Kuki communities, accounted for 77 per cent of the total violence in the north-eastern region in 2023, according to the latest annual report of the Union home ministry.

As many as 243 violent incidents were reported in the Northeast in 2023, of which 187 were in Manipur, the report said.

The counter-insurgency operations in Manipur resulted in the killing of 33 in-

surgents and the arrest of 184 insurgents, besides the recovery of 49 weapons. Further, 80 cadres of insurgent outfits surrendered with 31 arms, the ministry's 2023-2024 report published on Monday said.

Opposition parties and members of civil society groups have slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "studiously avoiding" a visit to the "most troubled state". Union home minister Amit Shah, who had visited the state in May 2023 and "was supposed to come again after 15 days", did not return.

In June, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had flagged the Cen-

tre's inaction in the strife-torn northeastern state which has witnessed ethnic violence for over a year, leaving at least 260 dead and over 60,000 displaced.

The annual report said that the rise in violent incidents in Manipur was because of the prevailing ethnic strife between the Meitei and Kuki communities and the resultant increase in casualties among both civilians and security personnel in comparison to 2022.

The report said large-scale ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur on

May 3, 2023. The violence resulted in numerous casualties, injuries and incidents of arson, it added.

Though the issue of violence primarily relates to maintaining public order, which is a state subject, the Centre has been consistently extending its support, as required by the N. Biren Singh government, the report said.

It said the Centre had taken a series of immediate and sustained actions to handle the situation. Immediate action was initiated by engaging with senior officials of Manipur, progressively deploying addi-

tional companies of Central Armed Police Forces, army and Assam Rifles columns, using helicopters and drones and implementing a unified command system, the Centre said.

During Shah's visit from May 29 to June 1, 2023, he held more than 15 meetings with government officers, security forces, political leaders and more than 100 members of civil society organisations, the report said.

Rocked by periodic violent clashes for more than 18 months between the Meiteis and the Kukis, the state has got divided into ethnic enclaves, it

said. Thousands of people are living in emergency shelters, unable to return home because of the ongoing violence.

Security experts have long recommended President's rule in the wake of the violence and alleged mishandling of the crisis by chief minister Singh.

In September, Shah had ruled out Singh's resignation and said the Centre was talking to both the communities to ensure lasting peace.

Responding to a question on the possibility of Modi visiting Manipur, Shah had said: "When he visits the state, it will be known to everyone."

MSP talk rider to Dallewal medical aid

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi: The Punjab government informed the Supreme Court on Tuesday that farm leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal was willing to consider ending his fast provided the Centre agreed to a discussion on minimum support price (MSP).



Jagjit Singh Dallewal's vital signs being monitored at the Khanauri border. File picture

"As per the negotiations, there is a proposal given by the farmers to the central government that if they get an invitation for talks, then Dallewal is ready to get medical aid as desired," Punjab advocate-general Gurmeet Singh told a vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia.

However, the bench said it was only concerned with compliance with its December 20 order by which it had directed the Punjab government to provide medical assistance to Dallewal and decide on

his hospitalisation.

Singh sought more time for the state government to comply with the order. He submitted that intervenors and negotiators had tried to follow the court directive by engaging the farmers in a dialogue. Additionally, the state government mobilised 7,000 personnel at the protest site, but farmer organisations' call for a Punjab bandh on Monday hindered its efforts, Singh said.

The bench recorded the submissions and posted the matter on January 2. "We are inclined to accept the request to afford some more time for compliance with the directions issued by the court," the bench said.

Punjab's chief secretary and director-general of police were directed to continue to appear virtually during the hearing.

On December 27, the apex court had asked the state government to deal with troublemakers with "an iron hand", saying it felt they were resisting the availability of medical aid to Dallewal.

The Punjab government had said it faced huge resistance from the protesting farmers who had encircled Dallewal and prevented him from being taken to hospital. The top court had blamed the state government for not doing enough to contain the situation.



Pinarayi Vijayan. File picture

Malicious: Kerala CM on Pak tag

CYNTHIA CHANDRAN

Thiruvananthapuram: A day after Maharashtra BJP minister Nitesh Rane termed Kerala a "mini-Pakistan", chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the remark was "deeply malicious and utterly condemnable".

Vijayan said Rane's comment had bared the approach of the Sangh Parivar towards Kerala. He said the comment by Maharashtra fisheries and port minister Rane was part of a "hate campaign" endorsed by the Sangh Parivar against Kerala, which believes in secularism and communal harmony.

"We strongly denounce this vile attack on Kerala and call upon all democratic and secular forces to unite against the Sangh Parivar's hateful propaganda," Vijayan wrote on X.

Congress leader K.C. Venugopal demanded a response from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and claimed that Rane's remark was an "orchestrated vile campaign". He compared the comments to former CPM statements on the poll victories of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

'Male topple plot' finger at India

► FROM PAGE 1

The *Post* report said: "The document also proposed paying 10 senior army and police officers and three powerful criminal gangs to ensure Muizzu's removal. To pay off the various parties, the conspirators sought 87 million Maldivian rufiyaa, or \$6 million, and according to two Maldivian officials, it would be sought from India. After months of secret talks, the plotters failed to gather enough votes to impeach Muizzu, and India did not pursue or finance an attempt to oust him."

Citing a conversation with an adviser to the Muizzu family, the *Post* report claims that in January 2024, a senior RAW officer at the Indian embassy in Washington explored a plan to overthrow the Maldivian President with two Indian intermediaries who

had political and business contacts in the Maldives.

"One intermediary was Shirish Thorat, a former Indian police officer who has worked as a private military contractor and who advised Mohamed Nasheed when he was the Maldivian president on how to curb Islamist radicalization," the *Post* report says.

"The other was Savio Rodrigues, a publisher based in the Indian state of Goa who previously served as a spokesman for India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. When contacted by *The Post*, Thorat and Rodrigues separately confirmed the existence of plans to remove Muizzu but declined to say whether they were working on the Indian government's behalf."

After the *Post* report was published, Rodrigues, in a post on X, said: "In an age where narratives are weaponised, the



Mohamed Muizzu. File picture

Washington Post — a known front of the U.S. Deep State — has sought to tarnish my commitment to my nation globally.

"Their recent expose, aimed at discrediting me, is not an indictment of my actions but a testament to the truth I represent and the challenges I confront in the defence of my country... I stand by my actions, unapologetic and resolute. If defending my country requires me to act 100 times over, I will do so

without hesitation."

The *Post* report further dwells on the "lengths to which India has gone to prop up one of the country's main parties, the Maldivian Democratic Party, after China forged relations with the MDP's rivals, led by former Maldivian president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom and his protégé, current president Muizzu".

It adds that India played a role in choosing the MDP's leaders and its candidates for elections.

"During the 2023 presidential election, when Muizzu ran a campaign criticizing Indian influence in the country and raising the banner 'India Out', polling analysts and campaign workers arrived from India to support the MDP's campaign against him, sparking concern among some Maldivian defense officials," the *Post* report says.

Tihar New Year offer: Free salon

► FROM PAGE 1

The prison official added: "Usually, the women flock to the parlour during festivals such as Karva Chauth and Diwali, or perhaps before a visit from a relative — even ahead of a court hearing."

The parlour isn't a profit-making venture. Sources said the earnings are used entirely to buy cosmetics and accessories.

Male prisoners at Tihar have been less lucky so far. They have ordinary salons catering to them at the 12 jails for men in the complex, where gov-

ernment barbers cut their hair and shave them free of cost.

"We are planning to set up fancy salons for the men, too, considering the demand from them. The men too want to look good," a jail superintendent said.

In the women's jail, only around 25 to 30 per cent of the nearly 550 inmates are convicts. The rest are accused awaiting trial, mostly in dowry cases. The inmates include several foreigners: many of them from Nigeria, facing drug and fraud charges.

The parlour offers a welcome break from the drear of the overcrowded barracks,

where life is all about strict adherence to the prison routine.

The inmates wake up at 5am and undergo a roll call. Breakfast is at 7am. Lunch is from 11am to noon. A part of the afternoon is allotted for meeting visitors, if any. Dinner is served early at 5pm.

Since 2019, Tihar has allowed some women convicts to work outside as part of an "open jail" rehab policy. This after Delhi High Court pulled up the jail authorities for discriminating against women convicts as a similar facility had earlier been provided to male inmates.

Under the open-jail scheme, well-behaved male and female convicts are allowed to work outside the Tihar complex for a stipulated period each day and have to return to their barracks by 5pm.

The women work mostly at beauty parlours outside, where they are paid more than what they earn working inside the jail. The men work mostly in shops.

The scheme, however, does not cover those convicted of offences against the state and those awaiting trial. The under-trials are only allowed to work in the jail factory or bakery.

₹6.6cr fake medicines seized in Calcutta

G.S. MUDUR

New Delhi: Drug regulatory authorities have seized from a wholesale premises facility in Calcutta large quantities of suspected spurious medicines, including purported anti-cancer and anti-diabetes drugs labelled as manufactured in other countries, the health ministry said on Tuesday.

A joint investigation by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and Bengal's Drugs Control Directorate into a firm named Care and Cure for You led to the seizure of the drugs claimed to be produced in Ireland, Bangladesh, Turkey and the US, the ministry said.

The drugs did not have supporting documents to show that they were legitimate imports into India, the ministry said. Without such documentation, the drugs are deemed spurious. Investigators also found empty packing materials, raising concerns over the authenticity of the products, it added.

The authorities, who have estimated the market value of the seized drugs to be ₹6.6 crore, have sent samples for quality testing. Following the investigation, the CDSCO's east zone drug inspector has taken into custody a woman identified as the proprietor of the wholesale firm, the ministry said. Spurious drugs mimic reputable brands, often containing harmful ingredients.

Suvendu's
NRC pitch
to evict
infiltrators

SAIBAL GUPTA

Calcutta: The leader of the Opposition, Suvendu Adhikari, has made a fresh push for the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Bengal, claiming it is necessary to identify infiltrators allegedly threatening the safety of society.

"West Bengal is a hub of such illegal immigrants, who have managed to mix with the general population with the help of a certain section of the society, emboldened by the reluctance of the Police in taking any action against them. The ruling party of the State perceive them as electoral assets which help them gain legal impunity," Adhikari wrote on X on Monday night.

"It's high time to implement NRC in WB to weed out these infiltrators who are sharing our resources like parasites and also threatening the security and safety of Indian Citizens," he added.

Adhikari provided details of several individuals he claimed were Bangladeshis living in India and engaging in various criminal activities. The Nandigram MLA urged the Union home ministry to initiate a thorough investigation by the NIA or any other agency into such activities.

The NRC, whose creation is mandated by the 2003 amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955, has the names of all Indian citizens. Its purpose is to document all legal citizens of India so that illegal immigrants can be identified and deported.

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Arup Chakraborty said Mamata Banerjee had already asserted that there would be no NRC in Bengal as long as she was the chief minister. "In this context, I would like to ask one question to Suvendu Adhikari. From where will the NRC start? From the house of former Union minister Nisith Adhikari or former Tripura chief minister Biplab Deb — they all have their roots in Bangladesh," added Chakraborty.

Gadkari
urges CM to
pave way for
highways

PRANESH SARKAR

Calcutta: Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari has written to chief minister Mamata Banerjee, urging her to intervene and facilitate the acquisition of land for 20 major national highway projects in Bengal, said a source.

The letter added that implementation of projects was facing "substantial delays" over problems related to land acquisition, the source added.

"I have been informed that in West Bengal, 9 projects are under DPR (detailed project report) and 11 projects costing ₹8,003.14 crore are under different stages of implementation. However, these projects are facing substantial delays due to pending approvals from district authorities for critical activities like land acquisition, forest clearance, utility shifting, etc.," reads the letter.

Sources in the state government said that the implementation of the projects was vital to upgrade infrastructure in the state.

The total cost would be much higher than ₹8,000 crore, a source said, explaining that the estimated cost for another nine projects, for which the DPR was being prepared, would be added to the amount mentioned by Gadkari.

"This huge investment will boost the economy of the remote areas," said a senior government official.

In his letter, Gadkari said projects — by both the NHAI and the state PWD — had been facing several kinds of land acquisition-related problems. He urged Mamata's intervention for speedy clearances to get work started.

However, a source said it was unlikely that land acquisition would gain momentum before the 2026 Assembly polls as it was a "sensitive" issue for the Bengal government.

'No reply' to plea for help to protect minority rights in Bangladesh
Monk's lawyer flags 'mum' Modi

SNEHAMOY
CHAKRABORTY

Calcutta: Rabindra Ghosh, a Bangladeshi lawyer attacked by radical Islamists while he was trying to move a bail plea for Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das in Chittagong, said on Tuesday that he had not received a reply to a letter he sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This time (over the arrest of the Hindu monk) we wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his help to protect the rights of minorities. I mentioned several other minority communities in Bangladesh.... However, I am yet to receive any reply from the Indian Prime Minister," the septuagenarian advocate told reporters during an interaction he had with Trinamool leader Kunal Ghosh in Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas.

By evening, the veteran lawyer, who has a history of cardiac problems, was admitted to the SSKM hospital with chest pain.

However, the claim made by the Hindu monk's lawyer in the day — with the TMC leader by his side — assumes political significance at a time when chief minister Mamata Banerjee has sought the intervention of the UN Peacekeeping Force to safeguard the interests of Bangladeshi minorities.

A source said the lawyer sought to meet Mamata to discuss issues related to "atrocities on Hindus" in Bangladesh and the way Das was arrested on November 25.

With lawyer Ghosh saying he hadn't yet received Modi's reply, TMC got an opportunity to attack the BJP, which had been vociferously backing the lawyer.

TMC leader Ghosh said that the Prime Minister's lack of response raised questions on the BJP's true intent.

"The Union government has to do something to prevent attacks on minorities in Bangladesh and provide them with legal assistance. The whole world knows that the Hindu monk has been arrested and jailed in Bangladesh and he is not getting justice. Now, if his lawyer does not get a reply from the Prime Minister, then questions can be raised about the BJP's true intent in protecting the safety and security of the minorities in Bangladesh," the TMC's Ghosh said.

The TMC leader also told the Bangladeshi lawyer that the Bengal chief minister had

already made it clear that the state government cannot intervene in the matter, as it pertains to international affairs.

Mamata has repeatedly stated that her state government will support whatever decision the Union government takes regarding Bangladesh.

Since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5, reports on atrocities on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh have become a political issue in India. The arrest of the monk has further escalated the relevance of alleged attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh.

The BJP leaders in Bengal, from various saffron platforms, have begun spinning a narrative that similar developments are likely to take place in Bengal, where the Mamata government has been, according to



TMC leader Kunal Ghosh (left) with Bangladeshi lawyer Rabindra Ghosh in Barrackpore on Tuesday

the saffron camp, appealing to the Muslims.

When asked about the lawyer's letter, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya said: "The reply to the letter (from Modi) will be given in due time. But the Trinamool Congress has no right to comment on the Union government's role, as they have been pushing West Bengal towards becoming another Bangladesh."

While the BJP and TMC are busy trading charges against each other for political mileage from the developments in Bangladesh, there is no clarity on when monk Das, whose bail plea is likely to come up for hearing on January 2, will be freed.

Amid reports that Das is unwell and may not be produced in the court, his lawyer Ghosh had been fearing for a while that the monk's prison term might get extended.

Earlier, the lawyer had also professed keenness in going to Chittagong to appear for Das on Thursday.

But with his hospitalisation on Tuesday, there is no clarity on when the ailing lawyer, who had recently come to Barrackpore for his treatment, would go back to Bangladesh.

Suvendu roars 'revenge' in Sandeshkhali

SUBHASISH CHAUDHURI

Calcutta: Suvendu Adhikari went to Sandeshkhali on Tuesday, a day after Mamata Banerjee's visit, to mount a scathing and communally tainted counteroffensive.

The Nandigram BJP MLA and leader of the Opposition declared that if the BJP came to power in Bengal, it would form a commission to probe into the "atrocities" unleashed by a section of Trinamool's local leadership on the Sunderbans island.

Trinamool turncoat Adhikari claimed the people of Sandeshkhali would never "forget or forgive" the atrocities that captured national attention through the first half of 2024.

At a public meeting on the pretext of the BJP's membership drive in Bengal, Adhikari peppered his address with communal remarks.

"(Minorities) do not vote for BJP. They even prevent



Suvendu Adhikari speaks in Sandeshkhali, North 24 Parganas, on Tuesday. Picture by Pashupati Das

Nurul Islam in September 2024.

"It is unfortunate that Mamata Banerjee said she would like to forget what happened here in Sandeshkhali. But no one in Sandeshkhali will forget the atrocities unleashed by her men. Once the BJP comes to power in Bengal, an investigating commission will be set up to probe these atrocities," Adhikari said, adding that Mamata would land "in jail".

He accused the Trinamool-led state government of implicating Sandeshkhali women in false cases for protesting against the alleged atrocities and claimed many whistleblowers were falsely charged.

"There will definitely be revenge, but according to the law and within the constitutional framework," he claimed, adding that Mamata and her "goons" had colluded with the state police to carry out "barbaric torture".

Govt job for murdered
minor girl's mother

OUR CORRESPONDENT


Raiganj: The Mamata Banerjee government has provided a job to the mother of a minor girl who was murdered after being allegedly raped in the Kaliaganj block of North Dinajpur district last year.

Krishna Kalyani, the Trinamool Congress MLA of Raiganj, handed over the appointment letter to the girl's mother on Tuesday. She has been given an attendant's job in the state land and land reforms

department with a consolidated monthly pay of ₹10,000.

On April 20, 2023, the girl was found dead near her village. From April 21, the villagers resorted to protests and soon, the BJP joined them.

The protests led to clashes between police and the villagers and the Kaliaganj police station was torched on April 25. On the same day, a youth was gunned down by the police during a raid conducted to round up those who had perpetrated the violence.



Haldia Energy Limited
2A, Lord Sinha Road, First Floor, Kolkata - 700 071

NOTICE
Gist of the Annual Performance Review (APR) and Fuel Cost Adjustment (FCA) Applications for 2022-23

1. The Haldia Energy Limited (HEL) has submitted applications before the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (Commission) for Fuel Cost Adjustment (FCA) and Annual Performance Review (APR) for 2022-23 in respect of 2 x 300 MW Generating Station and 400 kV Dedicated Transmission Line on 18.09.2023 and 30.11.2023 respectively. The FCA and APR applications have been admitted by the Commission on 04.01.2024 and 12.12.2023 in Case No: FPPCA-119/23-24 and APR-118/23-24 respectively.

2. Gist of the FCA and APR applications is as follows:

i. The FCA application is for approval of net Fuel Cost of Rs. 129951.60 Lakh and the APR application is for approval of net Fixed Cost of Rs. 113437.40 Lakh towards 2 X 300 MW Generating Station. HEL seeks to recover net revenue shortfall of Rs. 75338.40 Lakh for the year 2022-23 in respect of its 2 x 300 MW Generating Station.

ii. The APR application in respect of its 400 kV Dedicated Transmission Line is for approval of net Fixed cost of Rs. 16647.10 Lakh. HEL seeks to recover net revenue shortfall of Rs. 8692.10 Lakh for the year 2022-23 in respect of its 400 kV Dedicated Transmission Line.

3. The FCA and APR applications submitted by HEL may be inspected at the office of the Commission at Plot No: AH/5 (2nd Floor & 4th Floor), Premises No: MAR 16-1111, Action Area - 1A, Newtown, Rajarhat, Kolkata-700163 (Telephone No. (033) 2962-3756 and FAX (033) 2962-3757, email: cp-wb@regco.in) during office hours on all working days (from 11 AM till 5 PM) upto one day prior to the last date of submission of suggestion, objections and comments and copies of the APR application may also be downloaded from the website of HEL free of cost upto one day prior to the last date of submission of suggestion, objections and comments.

4. The FCA and APR applications have been posted on the website of HEL at www.haldiaenergy.co.in.

5. The objections and suggestions, if any, on the proposals contained in the applications may be submitted at the office of the Commission mentioned above within 21 (twenty-one) days, from 11 AM till 5 PM (including the date of publication) of publication of this notice in the newspaper.

6. This gist has been published with the approval of the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission.

Sayak Chatterjee
Company Secretary
Haldia Energy Limited

Place : Kolkata
Date : 31.12.2024
CIN: U74210WB1994PLC068154, Telephone No.: +91 33 2301 4051/+91 33 2301 4145, e-mail: haldiaenergy@regco.in, Website: www.haldiaenergy.co.in

कार्यालय, नगर पालिक निगम, कोरबा (छ.ग.)

क्र./8846/न.नि./2024-25/13978 कोरबा, दिनांक 24/12/2024

Notice Inviting Expression of Interest (Eoi) for

Selection of Consultant/Architectural Firm for preparing Architectural/Consultancy Services for preparation of Detailed Project Report for various infrastructure/development works for air quality improvement & other related works at Municipal Corporation Korba Area's, Korba (C.G.).

On behalf of Municipal Corporation Korba, Chhattisgarh the Commissioner, Municipal Corporation Korba invites Expression of Interest (Eoi) from the consultant's firms having experience in the field of preparation of Detailed Project Reports of various infrastructure/development works such as parks, buildings, ponds, roads, drains etc., for allotment of works on prescribed rate as mentioned in this Eoi for the works as mentioned above on the terms and conditions as per the Eoi document.

The last date of submission of proposal for Eoi document is 16.01.2025 up to 17:30 Hrs. Opening of proposal will be done on 17.01.2025 at 11.00 Hrs. Detailed Eoi Document can be Downloaded from uadcg.gov.in & korbamunicipal@n or from municipal corporation office.

Commissioner
MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
KORBA (C.G.)

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Happy New Year 2025



May you and your loved ones be blessed with a bright future in this new year.

MAMATA BANERJEE
Chief Minister, West Bengal

Government of West Bengal

STOCK CHECK

Sensex intra-day movement

Open

77982.57

High

78305.34

Low

77560.79

Close

78139.01

9.15 am

4.00 pm

Previous

78248.13

CURRENCIES

US \$

₹85.61

UK Pound

₹107.49

Euro

₹89.20

INDICES

BSE

Sensex

78139.01

-109.12

Midcap

46444.66

+58.31

Smallcap

55180.60

+391.16

NSE

Nifty

22644.90

-168.50

Next 50

68063.80

-493.35

Nifty 500

22357.15

-88.05

Most active on NSE

Scrip

Price*

Traded value#

ITI

386

3248.41

RITES

291

1715.02

HDFCBank

1772

1251.54

Unimech

1385

1170.78

MobiKwik

590

1094.92

*In ₹; #In ₹ crore

COMMODITIES

Gold (10 gram in ₹)

Pure

76350

—

Hallmark

72950

—

Silver (kg in ₹)

Bar

86250

-1450

Porlion

86350

-1450

Crude*

6098

+4

Copper#

795

-6.60

*per barrel in ₹; # per kg in ₹

MONEY MARKET

Yield (%)

Call rate

5.10-7.00

91-day T-Bill

6.74

1-year Gilt

6.80

5-year Gilt

6.84

10-year Gilt

6.87

Investors on edge in New Year

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Mumbai: Stock markets bid goodbye to 2024 on a not so good note with the benchmark Sensex ending lower 109 points and experts forecasting moderate returns in 2025.

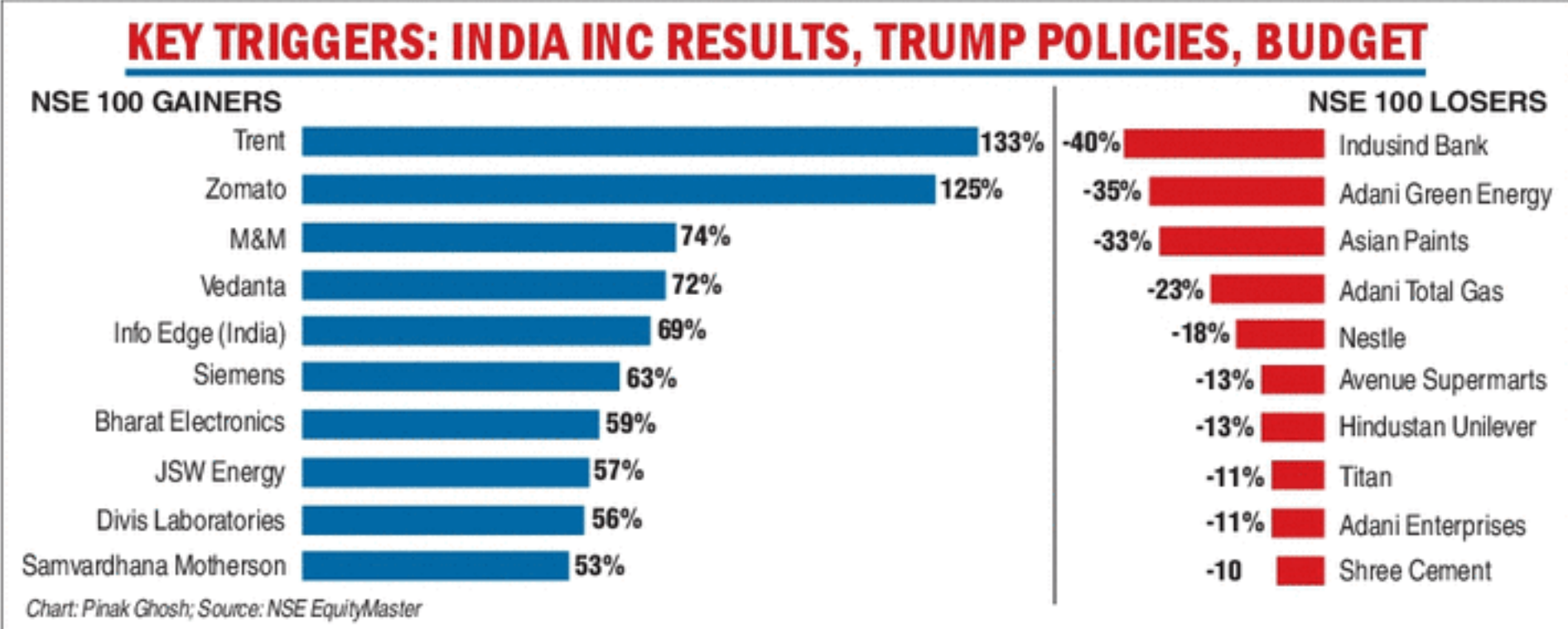
In the last session of 2024, the 30-share Sensex plummeted 687.34 points to touch a low of 77560.79. However, it recouped part of these losses to end with a loss of 109.12 points or 0.14 per cent at 78139.01. On the NSE, the broader Nifty 50 fell marginally 0.10 points to settle at 22357.15.

In 2024, the Sensex jumped 5898.75 points thereby giving a return of 8.16 per cent whereas the Nifty surged 1913.4 points or 8.80 per cent.

However, the broader markets have again outperformed with the Nifty midcap 50 index rising 21 per cent, the Nifty smallcap 50 index 25.3 per cent and the Nifty 100, 20.04 per cent.

Last year, the benchmark indices had showed solid gains when they jumped 18.8 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, over 2022.

The relatively lower returns have been attributed to expensive valuations, muted



earnings and FPI outflows. 2024 was also marked by key events that included the general elections where the ruling BJP did not get a majority on its own, and the Israel-Iran conflict.

During the year, the Sensex hit a record peak of 85978.25 on September 27 and the Nifty 50 touched a lifetime high of 26277.35.

However, they have slipped from these highs with foreign investors aggressively pressing the sell button particularly in the secondary markets.

Stocks have been rattled by the US Federal Reserve which

indicated slower pace of interest rate cuts in 2025 and also the election of Trump who is expected to bring in protectionist policies leading to higher inflation.

Market analysts feel that this will increase the attractiveness of assets such as the US dollar and treasuries leading to outflows from emerging markets.

Brokerages feel in the near term, stocks will react to the earnings season which will kick off from January 13 when HCL Technologies declares numbers for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024. This

will be followed by Infosys on January 16.

While the third quarter is a seasonally weak period for IT companies, analysts remain divided on whether October-December 2024 will show some improvement for other sectors on a sequential basis.

Twin developments

The earnings season will also coincide with Trump taking charge as the 47th President of the United States. Reversion of his policies will be felt on riskier assets such as stocks and even the rupee.

This will be followed by

the Union budget. The hope is that finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will address the issue of a slowdown in urban demand by giving tax reliefs. The stock markets are also expecting that she will give some good news on long-term capital gains tax (LTCG).

For now, brokerages are projecting that the Nifty could rise 8-10 per cent in 2025. While Citi has a December 2025 target of 25000, it is 27,000 for Goldman Sachs, 26500 for Bank of America Merrill Lynch and 26600 for Jefferies.

A note from Geojit Securities says the uncertainty sur-

rounding Trump's economic policies and high valuation may impact the stock market in the short term, particularly in emerging markets.

"There are no signs of recession, though tapering could influence valuations. A balanced approach, including specific stocks and sectors, along with investments in gold, silver, and debt instruments, is essential for portfolio stability," the brokerage said.

It is forecasting a base target of 26300 for December 2025 suggesting a moderate return of around 11 per cent from the current levels supported by expected earnings revamp from Q3.

Swapnil Aggarwal, director, VSRK Capital, said as investors approach 2025, the domestic stock market could see a year of moderate growth, with sector-specific opportunities in capital goods and infrastructure, financial Services, IT, healthcare and pharmaceuticals.

"Investors should approach the market with caution, balancing the opportunities with the inherent risks. Overall, 2025 promises sector-specific growth, but careful navigation of the market will be key to successful investing", he said.

EV player Ather set to take IPO ride

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Mumbai: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has given the go-ahead for the initial public offer (IPO) of Ather Energy. It will be the second pure play EV firm after Ola Electric Mobility to get listed on the bourses.

Ather Energy had filed its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) in September and it received the observation letter on December 23.

In Sebi parlance, obtaining observations means its go-ahead to float public issues.

Ather Energy's proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth ₹3,100 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of 2.2 crore equity shares by promoters and investors shareholders.

Proceeds from the fresh

MONEY TALK

- Second EV firm after Ola Mobility to tap markets
- Fresh issue of equity shares of ₹3,100cr
- Will set up a factory in Maharashtra
- Leela Hotels parent to enter market

Small savings rate

■ **NEW DELHI:** The Centre has left the interest rates unchanged on various small savings schemes, including PPF and NSC, for the fourth straight quarter beginning January 1. The interest rates for PPF and post office savings deposit schemes have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively. **PTI**

IT returns

■ **CALCUTTA:** The last date for filing belated return and revised return for assessment year 2024-25 has been extended by 15 days from 31st December 2024 to 15th January 2025.

WhatsApp UPI

■ **MUMBAI:** India on Tuesday delayed the implementation of market share caps for digital payments interface UPI by two years, a move that will benefit Google Pay and Walmart backed PhonePe. **Reuters**

Safe haven gold likely to touch ₹90,000

New Delhi: Gold, a safe-haven bet, is likely to continue its record-smashing journey in the New Year, rising to ₹85,000 per 10 grams and even ₹90,000 level if geopolitical tensions and global economic uncertainties continue.

Also aiding the run is a dovish tilt in monetary policy and buying by central banks, but if the geopolitical crisis eases, the precious metal will turn weak on a depreciating rupee.

Gold price is hovering at ₹79,350 per 10 grams in spot markets at present, and ₹76,600 per 10 grams in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

The precious metal capped off 2024 on a strong note with its best performance, notching 23 per cent returns in the domestic markets. The yellow metal hit an all-time high of ₹82,400 per 10 grams on October 30 this year. Silver mirrored this stellar performance with a 30 per cent gain, surpassing the ₹1 lakh level per kg level.

Globally, Comex gold futures started the year at around \$2,062 per ounce and

YELLOW SHINE

- Geo-political tensions and global uncertainties push up prices
- Central bank buying aiding surge
- Silver prices forecast to touch ₹1.25 lakh
- Some experts warn uncertainty premium is fading

rallied to a peak of \$2,790 per ounce on October 31, giving returns of up to 28 per cent, reinforcing their appeal amid global uncertainties.

Experts believe that precious metals remain strong performers in 2025 as well, buoyed by geopolitical tensions, central bank purchases, and a pivot towards lower interest rates by major central banks.

The outlook for gold in 2025 remains positive, though the pace of growth may moderate compared to 2024, LKP Securities VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency, Jateen Trivedi said.

"Domestic gold prices are expected to reach Rs 85,000 as modest targets, with a best-case scenario of Rs 90,000 and silver expected to deliver bit higher gains towards ₹1.1 lakh on modest and even hit ₹1.25 lakh, if geopolitical tensions persist or escalate," he said.

He noted that interest rate cycles are also pivotal as a global shift toward lower interest rates would inject liquidity into markets and weaken the dollar, bolstering the price of gold.

However, the US Federal Reserve's cautious approach to rate cuts may temper the pace of price increases.

Additionally, sustained gold purchases by central banks, driven by diversification strategies and currency stability will provide strong support to gold and silver, Trivedi said.

Commfrendz Research co-founder and chief executive officer Gnanasekar Thiagarajan said gold prices are struggling to keep up the momentum as the geopolitical uncertainty and economic uncertainty premium have started fading away. **PTI**

Adani Wilmar tanks 6%

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Mumbai: Shares of Adani Wilmar tumbled over 6 per cent on Tuesday after billionaire Gautam Adani's group announced its exit from the FMCG joint venture by selling its entire stake to the Singapore partner in the open market for over \$2 billion.

The stock ended 6.45 per cent lower at ₹308.25 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it tanked 7.95 per cent to ₹303.30.

Adani Green CEO

Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) on Tuesday announced that CEO Amit Singh will be stepping down effective March 31, 2025. He will be replaced by Ashish Khanna who is the CEO of the international energy business of the conglomerate.

AGEL said that the move is in alignment with the Adani group's routine internal leadership transitions and planning.

Shares of AGEL ended lower by 3.44 per cent at ₹1,041 following the announcement on Tuesday.

Core growth falls to 4.3%

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: Growth in eight core infrastructure sectors slowed to 4.3 per cent in November, down from 7.9 per cent in the same month a year earlier, government data showed on Tuesday. However, output growth rose from 3.7 per cent recorded in October, signalling a partial recovery.

The production of crude oil and natural gas contracted in November, while coal, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, and electricity posted slower growth compared with a year earlier.

Growth in coal production fell to 7.5 per cent from 10.9 per cent a year ago; refinery products to 2.9 per cent from 12.4 per cent and fertiliser to 2 per cent from 3.3 per cent.

Steel output grew 4.8 per cent against 9.7 per cent a year ago, while electricity production grew 3.8 per cent against 5.8 per cent.

Cement output was a bright spot, rising 13 per cent, a sharp improvement from its 3.1 per cent growth in October.

The eight core sectors contribute 40.27 per cent to the

NOV. SHOW

- Crude oil, natural gas show contraction
- Cement posts higher growth
- Steel, four others post lower growth
- Eight core sectors make up 40% of industrial index

Index of Industrial Production (IIP), a key measure of overall industrial activity in India.

Fiscal deficit

Fiscal deficit for April-November 2024 stood at ₹8.47 trillion, or 52.5 per cent of the full-year target of ₹16.13 trillion, government data showed. This compares with ₹9.07 trillion a year ago.

Total expenditure for the period rose to ₹27.41 trillion, up from ₹26.52 trillion year-on-year, while receipts climbed to ₹18.94 trillion from ₹17.46 trillion.

Capital expenditure, crucial for infrastructure development, fell to ₹5.14 trillion from ₹5.86 trillion.

issue will be used for capital expenditure to establish an electric two-wheeler factory in Maharashtra.

Meanwhile, the ₹5,000-crore proposed IPO of Schloss Bangalore Ltd, which operates Leela Palaces Hotels & Resorts, will consist of a fresh issue of equity shares worth ₹3,000 crore and OFS of shares valued at ₹2,000 crore by promoter Project Ballet Bangalore Holdings.

Schloss Bangalore, known for its luxurious hotels and resorts under The Leela brand, has a portfolio of 3,382 keys across 12 hotels. As of May 31, 2024, its portfolio includes The Leela Palaces, The Leela Hotels and The Leela Resorts.

Indo Farm shines

While the secondary markets remain under pressure due to worries over excess valuations, investors continue to bid for new entrants.

The IPO of Indo Farm Equipment which makes tractors and pick & carry cranes, was subscribed nearly 18 times on the first day of the sale.

Data from the Bombay Stock Exchange showed that against 84.7 lakh shares on offer, the float received bids for 15 crore shares.

Curbs on input tax credit for construction costs firmly in place

Anindita

Chatterjee

The GST Council has once for all settled two fundamental concepts that underlie the legislation on goods and services tax: the concepts of Blocked Credit and the Functionality Test that work in tandem to formulate the litmus test that determines whether entities are eligible to claim input tax credit.

At its 55th meeting held in Jaisalmer on December 21, the Council clarified the process to avail input tax credit even if this stoked some controversy over the manner in which the Council neutralised the effects of a Supreme Court verdict that had not gone in favour of the indirect tax authorities.

Input tax credit has been a hugely contentious issue and has triggered a surge in litigation as GST-registered entities have been frustrated by the denial of access to a fundamental element that lies

at the heart of the indirect tax system, which former chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian had once described as "one of the most ambitious and remarkable tax reforms" in India.

Subramanian was also the chairman of the committee appointed by the Narendra Modi government to prepare the roadmap for the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax designed to transform the country into a single market for the first time.

The very familiar concept of Blocked Credit as per the provisions of Section 17(5) of the CGST Act, 2017 restricts availment of Input Tax Credit on specific transactions/purchases which are not in alignment with business expenditures.

One such restriction emerging from the provisions of Section 17(5) of the CGST Act is that GST Registered Entities are forbidden to avail Input Tax Credit on expenses incurred pursuant to construction of an immovable property (other than plant or machinery) except where it is an input service for further supply of works contract service.

GST COUNCIL REMOVES 'DRAFTING ERROR'

- Supreme Court on October 3, 2024, has ruled expenses incurred to construct immovable property by a firm will enjoy input tax credit if the property is either 'plant or machinery' since revenues can be earned from property through lease or rental which is subject to GST
- Apex court ruled immovable property will have to be subject to a Functionality Test to determine whether it is a plant or a machinery. The ruling will benefit malls, warehouses and resorts. Cinema halls, hotels are not covered by the ruling.
- Section 17(5) of the CGST Act, 2017 deals with cases where input tax credit will not be available (Blocked Credit). Tax authorities blocked input tax credit using 17(5) Clause (C), Clause (D) in immovable property
- Clause C has criterion 'plant and machinery' and Clause D, 'plant or machinery'. Explanation to Section 17(5) has defined 'plant and

This sparked a major legal quibble over the semantics and the exact contours of this restriction that was spelt out in the provisions of Section 17(5) of the CGST Act.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in its decision on 3rd October 2024, in the case of Chief Commissioner of Central Goods and Service Tax v. Safari Retreats Private Ltd has held that Input Tax Credit on goods and services used in the construction of immovable property, such as

houses and resorts. Cinema halls, hotels are not covered by the ruling.

Section 17(5) of the CGST Act, 2017 deals with cases where input tax credit will not be available (Blocked Credit). Tax authorities blocked input tax credit using 17(5) Clause (C), Clause (D) in immovable property

Clause C has criterion 'plant and machinery' and Clause D, 'plant or machinery'. Explanation to Section 17(5) has defined 'plant and

malls etc, should be allowed when the property is further used for letting out on rent, which is a taxable supply under the provisions of the GST Law.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has held that the functionality test would need to be applied to determine whether the construction is of a "plant or machinery" to determine credit eligibility.

Critical points emerging out of the above mentioned Safari Retreat's case are as

machinery' but not 'plant or machinery'

The above Supreme Court ruling has clarified input tax credit can be available in case of 'plant or machinery' subject to Functionality Test

GST Council has approved an amendment at its December 21 meeting that 'plant or machinery' mentioned in section 17(5)(D) is a 'drafting error'. It should have read 'plant and machinery'. The change will apply retrospectively from July 1, 2017

follows:

The expression "plant or machinery" used in Section 17(5)(d) cannot be given the same meaning as the expression "plant and machinery" defined in the Explanation to Section 17(5) exempts "plant or machinery" from blocked credit, which is distinct from the expression "plant and machinery" used in clause (c) of Section 17(5). Therefore, the Explanation to Section 17, which defines "plant and ma-

chinery" is not applicable to clause (d).

The question whether a mail, warehouse or any building other than a hotel or a cinema theatre can be classified as a "plant" is a factual question which has to be determined keeping in mind the business of the person and the role that building plays in the said business.

If the construction of a building was essential for carrying out the activity of supplying services, such as renting or giving on lease, the building could be held to be a plant.

Therefore, by using the functionality test, in each case, it will have to be decided whether the construction of an immovable property is a "plant" for the purposes of clause (d) of Section 17(5).

The apex court accepted the arguments adduced by counsel for Safari Retreats which was built around the freedoms enshrined in Articles 14, 19 and 300A of the Constitution of India. Counsel claimed that the restriction of input tax credit in the instant case was not constitutionally valid – a view that the court accepted.

This brings us to the so-called Functionality Test which is critical in determining whether a building or structure qualifies as a 'plant' under the CGST Act for the purpose of claiming Input Tax Credit.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India drew a distinction between the term 'plant or machinery' in Section 17(5)(d) of the CGST Act 2017 from the expression 'plant and machinery' as defined in the explanation to Section 17 of the CGST Act 2017.

The upshot of the Supreme Court verdict was that tax demand of a little over ₹11.58 crore raised by the adjudicating authority under the classification of 'Renting of Immovable Property' services, was set aside on merits.

The apex court in the Safari Retreats case threatened to open up a flood of litigation with other GST-registered entities likely to quote this as a precedent to make similar claims for "unblocking" input tax credit that they were denied in almost similar circumstances.

This is when the GST Council acted quickly to shut down a raft of litigations by ap-

proving an amendment to Section 17(5)(d) of CGST Act, 2017.

It said: "To align the provisions of section 17(5)(d) of CGST Act, 2017 with the intent of the said section, the Council has recommended amending section 17(5)(d) of CGST Act, 2017, to replace the phrase "plant or machinery" with "plant and machinery", retrospectively, with effect from 01.07.2017, so that the said phrase may be interpreted as per the Explanation at the end of section 17 of CGST Act, 2017."

The loophole in the legislation – which the authorities described as a "drafting error" – has slammed the door on tortuous legal argument on a key aspect of the GST legislation and protects the interests of Revenue.

This "retrospective amendment" will have big implications in several other areas as well.

It would not be out of place to mention that the cost of construction significantly adds to the cost of products for several industries. Hence, it has become critical for industry to fall in line and adhere to the core principles of the GST Law.



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IN BRIEF

App cab hits bike

■ **BEHALA:** A pillion rider on a motorcycle was injured after an app cab hit the two-wheeler on James Long Sarani on Tuesday afternoon. Joyeeta Das, 38, was admitted to hospital.

Fire in room

■ **SURVEY PARK:** A room in a three-storey residential building caught fire in Santoshpur early on Tuesday. Three fire tenders doused the flames. No one was injured.

YESTERDATE

January 1, 1846

■ On this day, Barasat Government School, which later came to be known as Barasat Peary Charan Sarkar High School, was set up by its founder-headmaster Peary Charan Sarkar. Scholar, teacher and champion of women's rights, Sarkar founded another school in the area the following year. With brothers Nabin Krishna Mitra and Kalikrishna Mitra providing financial support, Sarkar set up a school for girls that was later renamed Kalikrishna Girls' High School.

John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune was impressed by this school before he started Bethune School for girls in Calcutta.

Sarkar worked as the headmaster of Barasat Government School till 1854, when he was appointed headmaster of Colootollah School, later Hare School.

Sarkar is also the author of *First Book*, a primary English textbook that was widely read for a long time.

Chandrima S. Bhattacharya
For suggestions on dates/
events mail us at:
yesterdaydate@abp.in

WEATHER

YESTERDAY

☀️ **Maximum:** 22.6°C (-2.8)

🌙 **Minimum:** 17.3°C (+3.5)

☁️ **RAINFALL:** Nil

💧 **HUMIDITY:** Max: 92%,
Min: 63%

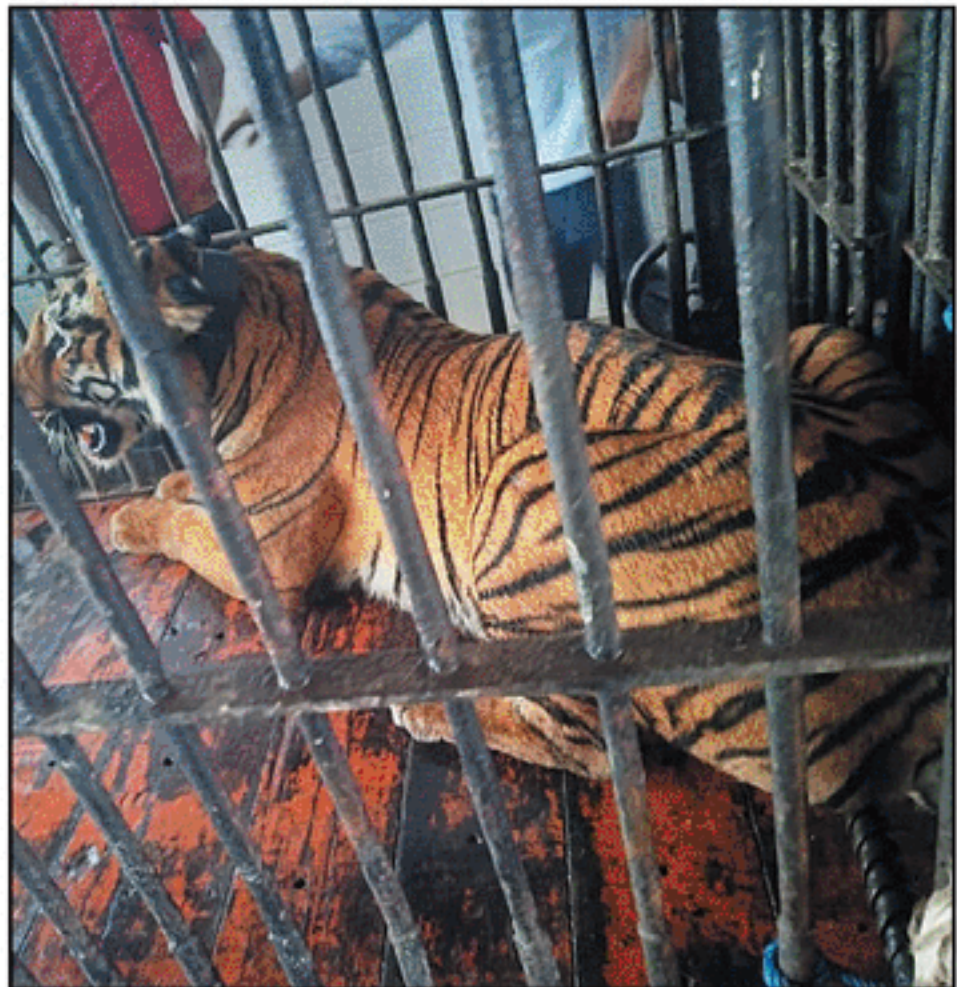
THE FORECAST

☀️ **Maximum** 24°C
🌙 **Minimum** 15°C

☁️ **EXPECTED:**
Mainly clear sky

🌇 **SUNSET** 5.03pm
🌅 **SUNRISE** 6.16am

Odyssey ends, big cat heads home



Zeenat at the Alipore zoo hospital on Tuesday

Zeenat leaves Alipore zoo for Similipal forest

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: Tigress Zeenat left the Alipore zoo on Tuesday night for Similipal in Odisha, the same forest she had escaped on December 5 and went on a month-long odyssey covering three states before being captured in Bankura on Sunday.

She was cleared for the trip back to the Similipal Tiger Reserve after spending two days at the Alipore zoo hospital, where she was under observation.

A convoy of around 10 vehicles left Alipore around 8.10pm. A vehicle carrying Zeenat bore the name of the Odisha forest department. She was taken in a transport cage mounted on the vehicle. It had cars in the front and at the back.

A team of foresters accompanied Zeenat. It included officers from the Odisha forest department, led by the field director of the Similipal Tiger Reserve, and a group of forest officers from Bengal.

"She is absolutely fine. She will reach Odisha via Kharagpur and Lodhashuli. The total journey will take more than five hours because there will be stops in between. We are providing police escort. Our officers will also accompany them till the Bengal-Odisha border. A team of vets is travelling with the tiger," said S. Kulandaivel, chief conservator of forests,

central circle, Bengal.

At the zoo, Zeenat was offered chicken, goat meat and buffalo meat but did not eat anything till Tuesday evening, said a forest official.

"She is otherwise fine. She is moving in the cage. She has had ORS," he said.

"A medical board constituted by the state forest department certified that Zeenat is fit for the long journey. Apart from that, a high-powered, multi-stakeholder committee set up according to the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority has said that Zeenat is fit for travel. I have no doubt that she can make it," said Debal Ray, the chief wildlife warden of Bengal.

Zeenat was slightly dehydrated when she came to Alipore. Her temperature, pulse, appetite, energy and behaviour were monitored by a team of vets and keepers, an official said. Her blood and stool samples were tested for parasites because she had wandered close to human settlements and fed on livestock.

Once in Similipal, Zeenat will be soft-released into the park.

"A large area will be cat-fenced. The area will have a sufficient prey base. She is going to stay in the natural forest of Similipal. Once she settles down and the anxiety level is lowered, she will be hard-released (into a forest without fencing)," said a forest official.

Ire over tigress shift to Calcutta facility

SUBHASHISH MOHANTY

Bhubaneswar: The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has questioned the Bengal forest department's decision to shift the three-year-old tigress Zeenat to the Alipore zoo in Calcutta following its translocation.

In a letter to the chief wildlife warden of Bengal, assistant inspector general of forests in the NTCA, Md Sajid Sultan, said: "It is also requested to appraise this authority for the reasons why the said tigress was shifted to Alipore Zoo, instead of translocating it back to the state of Odisha as per the SOP of the NTCA."

Zeenat, who moved out of the Similipal Tiger Reserve and ventured into Bengal, was tranquilised in the Bankura forest in Bengal on Sunday and later shifted to the Alipore zoo. The Bengal forest department's move has led to a lot of criticism from wildlife lovers as well as forest officials in Odisha.

"After the translocation, Zeenat should have been immediately brought to the Similipal Tiger Reserve. Our request has been ignored," said a senior official of the Odisha government.

Following Odisha's concern, the NTCA has also asked Bengal to initiate steps to translocate the tigress to Odisha.

In the letter, the NTCA said: "The animal under question is to be released in the wild and in order to avoid any imprinting or human interaction in captivity, as requested by the Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha, I am directed to reiterate under section 380(2) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the said tigress may please be translocated back to Similipal Tiger Reserve at the earliest following the due process of SOP of NTCA."

The NTCA also reminded the Bengal chief wildlife warden that Zeenat was brought to the Similipal Tiger Reserve from the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra) under a special initiative to improve the genetic constitution of the tigers in the Odisha tiger sanctuary.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Destination Park Street to ring in the New Year

SUBHAJOY ROY,
MONALISA CHAUDHURI,
SAMARPITA BANERJEE
AND DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: Revellers flooded streets and trooped into pubs and restaurants as the city bade farewell to 2024 and welcomed the New Year.

Since afternoon, Park Street and its adjoining roads had been teeming with year-end revellers.

The weather — a drop in the afternoon temperature and a gentle breeze since the morning — played along.

"I had been trying to visit Park Street for the last few days but it was so warm that I decided against coming. The weather is pleasant today. Since today is 31st, I did not let go of the opportunity," said Debayudh Mitra, 22, who works for an MNC in Hyderabad.

A resident of Hooghly's Uttarpara, Mitra came to Park Street with his parents.

The restaurants were packed from noon till late afternoon, with barely a lean phase. From around 8pm, long queues had again formed outside Mocambo, Peter Cat, Trincas and Kwaliti, among others.

The Alipore Met office said the maximum temperature on Tuesday was 22.6 degrees Celsius, 2.8 notches below normal. The maximum in the last few days remained above normal.

"The minimum temperature is also likely to dip from



Visitors to Park Street on New Year's Eve.

Picture by Pradip Sanyal

Tuesday for two-three days but will rise again owing to western disturbances. Tuesday was breezy since the morning," said an official in the India Meteorological Department, Calcutta.

Restaurants in the Park Street area were packed even during non-rush hours on Tuesday.

Sudesh Poddar, the president of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India, said a sizeable number of those visiting the restaurants on Park Street on Tuesday were from offices in the vicinity.

"A lot of people from offices had come for an afternoon lunch on the last day of the

year. The tables were packed till 4.30pm or 5pm, which are usually lean hours on a working day," said Poddar.

"The tables were packed till late afternoon. There was a relative lull in the early evening and it picked up again from 8pm. There was a queue of at least 20 people by 8.30pm," said Anand Puri, one of the partners of Trincas on Park Street.

A woman who visited Park Street in the evening said most people had leather jackets and other winter wear on them. "There was a nip in the air and a breeze could be felt," she said.

Kids, their parents and young people had thronged

the Maidan in the afternoon. Many were spotted playing games under the afternoon sun. A police officer said the crowd was manageable and traffic ran without any hindrance.

The police had created a pedestrian channel on Park Street by carving out space from the carriageway.

"The channel has been created so pedestrians do not come to the middle of the road and to prevent accidents. It also helped pedestrians as the increase in the number of visitors to Park Street on New Year's Eve meant the footpaths were packed," said an officer of Kolkata Police.

The police deployed an additional 4,500 personnel across the city on Tuesday. The majority of them were on and around Park Street.

"There were women officers, plainclothesmen and senior officers on duty," said an officer.

Traffic along Park Street will be one-way, west to east (Chowringhee to Park Circus), from 1pm on Tuesday till early on Wednesday. Usually, Park Street is open for two-way traffic from 10pm till 6am.

Shakespeare Sarani (Theatre Road), too, will be one-way, from east to west (Park Circus to Chowringhee), from 1pm on December 31 till 3am on January 1.

The officer said the roads are kept one-way to deal with the possible spurt in the number of revellers and vehicles on Park Street around midnight.

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CALENDAR ON THEME OF BENGAL'S SPIRITS

A ghost for each month in 2025

SUDESHNA BANERJEE

Calcutta: It's one-legged and carries the children it steals to treetops, from where it drops them. Another is diminutive and is the harbinger of wealth if it lingers in a house. Yet another appears as a phosphoric glow over a swamp that draws one to it, causing one to drown.

Such many and various spirits, friendly or fiendish, are the theme of a desk calendar that has been created for the new year. Mad Bongs, a collective of creative Bengalis, has produced the calendar presenting a ghost for each month of the year. "We had started three years ago as a comics group as we are all creators of comics. The calendar is our annual venture," said Harsho Mohan Chatteraj, a comic book artist.

In 2022, they had tied up with a group of food connoisseurs called Calcutta Gastronomes to produce a calendar on the city's foodscape. The group has partnered the calendar's launch event since.

"For 2024, they produced one on communities. This year, they toyed with herit-



Skandhakata, a headless ghost, portrayed as a royal killed in battle; (right) Mechho Bhoot that loves fish and hence steals it



age and folk art before they hit upon ghosts of Bengal," said Neela Majumdar of Calcutta Gastronomes, which curated a "ghost-inspired" menu for a dinner at The Food Storey in Lake Road. The 2025 calendar was launched over the dinner on Monday.

"We were initially worried whether people would object to keeping pictures of ghosts at home or if it would scare children. But we went ahead as we were illustrating the ghosts in a friendly style," said Sourav Datta, a scriptwriter.

While 10 ghosts were automatic choices, they struggled over the last two. Ghosts from other cultures and those without visual references were discarded.

Finally, djinns, despite their Arabic origin, were accepted as they occur in our literature. Dhankudra, a wealth-producing spirit, whose cult prevails on the Bengal-Bihar border, was the last to be included.

While Sourav and Sumit Surai wrote the verses on each ghost, the illustrations were done by Harsho, Charbak Dipta, Avik Kumar

Maitra and Trinankur Banerjee.

Banerjee, who picked Skandhakata, Ekanore and Aleya from a pool of ghosts, based the decapitated neck of the first on that of Chinnamasta, a headless Tantric goddess, who is worshipped during Kali Puja as a part of Dasamahavidya.

"The blood spurts out of the severed neck that way. For its attire, I followed the lithographs of princes in the fairy tales of *Thakurmar Jhuli*, as Skandhakata is said to be a royal who was killed in battle," he said.

He recalled hearing of Ekanore's spine-chilling tales from his grandmother. "The evil ghost would steal the lives of children in shells of green coconuts, she would tell us. In those days, without gated communities and closed-circuit TV cameras, such stories acted as deterrents to keep children from wandering off with strangers," he said.

The calendar, priced ₹250 and available online and at select bookstores, would help connect today's children with an endearing part of Bengal's culture, the creators hope.

Mob attack vehicles after accident in Ultadanga

Race between buses injures pedestrian

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Ultadanga: Two buses racing along a busy road in Ultadanga left a pedestrian critically injured and triggered a mob fury on Tuesday morning, police said.

The accident happened at the crossing of Muraripukur Road and Ultadanga Main Road, near Telengabagan, around 10.45am on Tuesday, the police said.

The buses were moving towards Ultadanga station.

One of the buses hit a woman, who the police said was trying to cross the road.

The woman, Anima Dutta, 62, is a resident of Canal Circular Road in Duttabagan. She has been admitted to RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

The drivers have been arrested and charged with rash and negligent driving, an officer said.

"This (buses involved in racing to pick up more passengers) is a regular practice. Buses and autorickshaws often cause accidents in the area but police are doing nothing to stop them," said an angry commuter who lives in the area.

A mob smashed the wind-screens of the two buses and



The buses after the accident on Tuesday. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

damaged the seats.

One of the buses was on the Bagbazar-Garia route and the other was on the Howrah-Barasat route.

Eyewitnesses said the wheels of one of the "racing" buses went over the woman's waist. She was unconscious while being shifted to the hospital.

In 2023, almost 15 per cent of the total road accidents in the city were caused by buses. According to police records, pedestrians are most vulnerable to accidents. Of the 159 people who died in road accidents in Calcutta in 2023, 73 were pedestrians.

Senior officers of Kolkata Police said vehicles as well as pedestrians need to follow traffic rules to avoid accidents.

"It is vital that vehicles follow traffic rules. But pedestrians, too, should follow rules and desist from jaywalking or crossing roads when the signal for vehicles is green," said an assistant commissioner in the traffic department of the city police.

Buses are major violators of traffic norms as they stop at will to pick up and drop off passengers. They are also often driven recklessly to pick up more passengers than other buses on the route.

46,000 prosecuted for traffic rule violations

KINSUK BASU

Calcutta: More than 7,000 motorists were prosecuted across Calcutta for violating traffic signals and over 4,500 were penalised for driving two-wheelers without wearing a helmet between December 27 and 30, figures released by Kolkata Police showed.

The figures showed that prosecutions for drink driving were the fewest — 237 — out of the 46,000-odd cases recorded in the four days in the areas under the 26 traffic guards of the city police.

The highest number of

cases of helmetless riding — 1,523 — was recorded on December 30. The highest number of signal violation cases — 1,983 — was recorded on December 27.

Driving without a helmet attracts a fine of ₹1,000, while jumping traffic signals costs a motorist ₹500 the first time and ₹1,500 for subsequent violations.

"The figures suggest that the awareness of not driving in a drunken state has increased, particularly among revellers, during the festive time. A section of motorists tends to flout rules but we urge them not to do so at the cost of risking their lives and that of their close ones," said a senior officer at Kolkata Police headquarters in Lalbazar.

"The drive will continue. We will step up our vigil and campaign."

During the period, over 2,000 motorists were prosecuted for speeding. The fine for overspeeding for two-wheelers and cars is ₹1,000 for the first time and ₹2,000 for subsequent violations.

Officers said cases of overspeeding were mostly recorded at night on some key roads, including EM Bypass, the Rashbehari connector,

AJC Bose Road and Diamond Harbour Road. The highest number of cases of overspeeding — 613 — was recorded on December 29.

"The number of surveillance cameras has increased. So have physical checks involving teams of officers. All traffic guards have been instructed not to conduct *naka* checks during special night raids at specific locations so that motorists can't get away with violations. The police teams on duty to check motorists will change locations in each traffic guard area," the officer said.

Besides drink driving, speeding and jumping signals, cases were also recorded for using mobile phones while driving, riding two-wheelers with more than one pillion rider, violating "No-Entry" signs and rash driving.

"We have instructed clubs to make separate arrangements to accommodate more cars for their visitors since several stretches will be declared 'No Parking' zones on the first day of the year as part of police arrangements to control crowds on New Year's Eve and January 1," said a senior officer of the South Traffic Guard.

FLOUT FIGURES

(December 27 to 30)

- Total prosecutions: 45,927
- Traffic signal violations: 7,166
- Riding two-wheelers without wearing a helmet: 4,609
- Speeding: 2,261
- Drink driving: 237
- Rash driving: 536

Source: Kolkata Police

Doctors end sit-in, vow to intensify protests

SUBHAJOY ROY AND SAMARPITA BANERJEE

Calcutta: The Joint Platform of Doctors (JPD) ended its sit-in protest on the RG Kar issue at Esplanade on Tuesday.

JPD members, who had earlier spoken about extending their sit-in beyond December 31, said they would intensify their protests and have plans to take the movement to Delhi.

The protest in the Metro Channel, the stretch of Chowringhee Road opposite Metro cinema, began on December 20. The protest deadline was extended once by Calcutta High Court.

"We did not seek another extension because we found that despite continuing the sit-in for 10 days, the state government was completely indifferent to our demands. We will now intensify our protests and force the government to act," said Tamonas Chaudhuri, a JPD member.

Punyabrata Goon, another JPD member, said they have plans to take the protests to New Delhi, but when and how have not been decided yet.

Chaudhuri said the sit-in was hamstrung by the high court's restriction on the strength of the gathering. "We could not ask more people to



A torch rally at Esplanade demanding justice for the RG Kar rape-and-murder victim on Tuesday evening. Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

come as it would have violated the court's order. The curb impacted the spontaneity of the protests," Chaudhuri said.

The JPD has three demands:

- The CBI must submit a supplementary chargesheet against former RG Kar principal

Sandip Ghosh and former Tala police station officer-in-charge Abhijit Mandal in connection with the rape and murder of a junior doctor at the hospital on August 9.

- The state government must allow the prosecution of Ghosh and former RG Kar house staff Ashis Pandey in a case related to alleged financial irregularities at RG Kar.
- Those involved in an alleged larger conspiracy behind the rape and murder be brought within the purview of the probe.

Kolkata Police had initially denied permission for the sit-in when the JPD sought their consent in mid-December. The JPD then petitioned the high court, which gave the nod but added that the size of the gathering could not exceed 250. The court also announced a curb on the size of the area that could be cordoned off because of the sit-in.

The court later said no more than 100 people could gather at the protest site.

The police turned down the JPD's request for permission to extend the deadline of the protest citing the high court's order that the sit-in could continue till December 26. The platform then approached the high court and got an extension.

छावनी परिषद बैरकपुर
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No. C/IV/10/PMM/VOL-II/374 Date: 30.12.2024

PUBLIC NOTICE

Following person/persons claim mutation of name in respect of the holding as mentioned below within the Barrackpore Cantonment.

Sl. No.	Name of applicant claiming mutation	Holding No.
1	Sibu Sarkar	Holding No. 38, Chappar Mahal, Sadar Bazar, Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, Property ID-PT-CB-BARR-2021-07-09-009951.

Objection, if any, may be filed with documentary evidence within 30 days of publication of this notice, failing which the mutation for the purpose of taxation may be accorded under section 81 of the Cantonments Act, 2006.

Sd/- Chief Executive Officer
Cantonment Board, Barrackpore

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CANTONMENT BOARD, BARRACKPORE
रक्षा मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार | MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, GOVT. OF INDIA
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No. C/IV/10/PMM/VOL-II/349 Date: 30.12.2024

PUBLIC NOTICE

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Sl. No.	Name of applicant claiming mutation	Holding No.
1	Sambhu Nath Dutta, Ayan Dutta	Holding No. 77, Lakri Mahal, Orderly Bazar, Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, Property ID-PT-CB-BARR-2021-07-09-011253.

Objection, if any, may be filed with documentary evidence within 30 days of publication of this notice, failing which the mutation for the purpose of taxation may be accorded under section 81 of the Cantonments Act, 2006.

Sd/- Chief Executive Officer
Cantonment Board, Barrackpore

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No. C/IV/10/PMM/VOL-II/361 Date: 30.12.2024

PUBLIC NOTICE

Following person/persons claim mutation of name in respect of the holding as mentioned below within the Barrackpore Cantonment.

Sl. No.	Name of applicant claiming mutation	Holding No.
1	Prabhat Kumar Yadav	Holding No. 2, Lootary Mahal, Orderly Bazar, Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, Property ID-PT-CB-BARR-2021-07-09-010938.

Objection, if any, may be filed with documentary evidence within 30 days of publication of this notice, failing which the mutation for the purpose of taxation may be accorded under section 81 of the Cantonments Act, 2006.

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11, including apartment staff, held ₹1cr jewellery theft from trader home

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Chetla: Diamond ornaments and other valuables worth more than around ₹1 crore were reported missing from the south Calcutta apartment of a city businessman.

Police arrested 11 people, including four employees at the house who had allegedly been stealing ornaments gradually and replacing them with imitation jewellery.

Those arrested included two housekeeping staff, a cook and a nanny.

The cops said the thefts were carried out over several months.

Amit Singh, the businessman, had lodged two complaints with Chetla police station last week.

The theft was detected recently when the family, residing in an apartment in a high-rise on Raja Santosh Roy Road in Chetla, realised that a diamond-encrusted bracelet and a pair of diamond earrings were missing from the house.

One of the complaints the family lodged was against Samar Naskar, a housekeeping staff; Jhuma Das, a nanny working in the house; and Supriya Purkait, who worked as a cook in the house.

During questioning, the trio reportedly admitted to their crime and said another employee, Saraswati Das, was also involved in the theft. The four were arrested.

The arrests were made earlier in December and all four are in police custody.

"The family lodged a second complaint reporting the theft of several other valuables from the house, including silver utensils, gold and silver coins, some rare coins and a diamond ring — whose total worth is more than ₹1 crore," said an officer at Chetla police station.

During the investigation and based on the statements of the accused, the police conducted a raid at the Metiabruz home of Das, the nanny, and recovered a portion of the stolen booty on Monday.

Based on information gath-

ered during the interrogation of the accused, the cops learnt that a portion of the stolen booty was sold to several receivers across the city.

Multiple raids were conducted in the Metiabruz, Watgunge and Girish Park police station areas. Seven more people, who the police said had bought the stolen articles, were arrested on Monday night.

The police identified them as Priyanka Das, Rumi Singh, Ashok Jana, Sanat Fadikar, Prasenjit Manna, Tanmay Ojha and Mihir Raha.

On Tuesday, the seven were produced in court and remanded in police custody.

Senior officers involved in the probe said one should hire household help after proper background checks.

"One should be very careful while recruiting people at home. Outsiders should be trusted only to a certain extent and it is important to inform the local police station about the staff the family is recruiting," said an officer at Lalbazar.

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NOTICE

THE CALCUTTA SWIMMING CLUB
Notice is hereby given that a Special General Meeting (SGM) of the Permanent Members of The Calcutta Swimming Club will be held on Saturday, the 4th day of January, 2025 at 11:30 AM at The Calcutta Swimming Club, 1 Strand Road, Kolkata-700001. Please note that no Guest(s)/Temporary & Honorary Members may attend. 00000644

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₹10 'surcharge' for ride on last Metro

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: Any ride on the last Metro between Kavi Subhash (New Garia) and Dum Dum in the north-south corridor (Blue Line) will cost an extra ₹10 from New Year's Day.

From January 1, a passenger must pay a fixed "surcharge" of ₹10 on any ticket — in addition to the fare — on the Metro trains that leave the two stations at 10.40pm from Monday to Friday. For smart card users, ₹10 will be deducted from the balance on the card.

The 10.40pm trains do not run on Saturdays and Sundays. Metro officials linked the

surcharge to "low footfall" on the last trains.

The Metro fare for one ride in the Blue Line ranges between ₹5 and ₹25.

Dakshineswar is the terminal station in the north-south corridor. But the Dakshineswar-Dum Dum section is not included on the last trains' route. The last train leaves Dakshineswar at 9.33pm.

Multiple passengers alleged the carrier was reluctant to run the last trains. When the carrier had on May 24 started the "special night trains", they left Kavi Subhash (New Garia) and Dum Dum stations at 11pm. From June 24, the timing was brought forward

to 10.40pm citing the same reason: low passenger count.

The decision to run the 11pm trains came within weeks of Calcutta High Court asking the Metro Railway to "consider" a petition that sought a direction to the carrier to extend the timings of the last trains in the north-south corridor.

The decision to impose the surcharge was first announced on December 2. It was supposed to have been in force from December 10. But on December 10, the carrier said the move had been "deferred for some technical reason".

"Metro Railway, Kolkata has decided to start levying ₹10

as surcharge on a trial basis on every ticket irrespective of the distance travelled by the commuter for the special night services which are operated from Kavi Subhash and Dum Dum both ways at 10.40pm on weekdays from Wednesday onwards. The occupancy of these special services has been very poor," the carrier said in a statement.

"The last trains barely run with 400 passengers. A train ferries some 5,000 passengers in the peak hours."

Many passengers have, however, flagged the "challenges" of availing the last Metro.

The manual ticket coun-

ters are mostly shut after the second-last trains (that leave Dum Dum and New Garia at 9.40pm) end their journeys. Only the automated token vending machines are operational. A fair share of the Metro passengers still do not have smart cards.

A passenger headed to Toll-yunge found only one gate of Chandni Chowk station, opposite the Hindustan Building on Central Avenue, open after passing by at least three more gates that were shut. That was around 10.45pm last Friday.

"There was no staff to answer any query. The gates that are otherwise busy were shut," said the passenger.

IN BRIEF

Fall from bus

■ **PARK STREET:** Madhusudan Mishra, 70, fell while alighting from a bus at the Mullickbazar crossing on Monday. A resident of Posta, Mishra was admitted to a private hospital. The bus fled, police said.

Biker, pillion rider hurt

■ **HASTINGS:** A motorcyclist and the pillion rider were injured as a vehicle hit the two-wheeler on Vidyasagar Setu on Monday. The vehicle that hit them was yet to be identified.

1 injured

■ **KASBA:** Arjun Mondal, 20, was injured when the car he was driving hit another vehicle on EM Bypass near the Ruby crossing on Monday, police said. He was admitted to hospital.

Fire damaged Durgapur Bridge concrete: KMDA

SUBHAJOY ROY

Calcutta: The temperature of the concrete under the Durgapur Bridge in Chetla had gone up significantly on December 21 when a fire gutted shanties under the bridge, sources in the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) said. The heat damaged the concrete.

The soaring temperature caused by the fire decreased the moisture content in the concrete, KMDA sources told Metro. The concrete loosened and fell off in multiple places. If the damaged portions are left unattended, the steel reinforcements inside may get exposed and weaken the structure.

The KMDA plans to start the repairs in a few days. Grouting, a process of injecting concrete mixture in high pressure through a nozzle, will be carried out in the voids or gaps. This will strengthen the structure. The KMDA will also gunite the surface, where a mixture will be sprayed on the surface from where concrete chunks fell off.

"The objective of both grouting and guniting is to increase the bridge's load-bearing capacity. While grouting works deeper and strengthens the concrete by filling the voids, guniting increases the thickness of the concrete," said Gokul Mondal, a professor at Jadavpur University.

"Concrete turns acidic if the moisture content decreases significantly. This can lead to corrosion of the embedded steel and weaken the concrete," Mondal added.

Last Thursday, chief minister Mamata Banerjee raised concerns about the damage to the bridge. "The health of Durgapur Bridge has been damaged because of the fire. We have been forced to impose some restrictions. We have to undertake an extensive repair job. It is going to cost us a lot of money. We sent a team for inspection... which revealed that the flames damaged the bridge," Mamata said at a news conference at Nabanna, the state secretariat.

The state government has barred the movement of heavy vehicles on the bridge connecting New Alipore and Chetla which is also used by thousands commuting to and from Behala every day.

The fire in the shanties broke out on a Saturday evening and the temperature of the concrete was measured the next afternoon, KMDA sources said.

"We recorded the temperature to be 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3 degrees Celsius) on Sunday afternoon. It must



Spots under the Durgapur Bridge from where concrete chunks have fallen. Pictures by Bishwarup Dutta

have been several degrees higher when the fire was on and even for hours after. The exposure to the heat led to a decrease in moisture content and we have noticed local spalling in multiple points," said a KMDA official.

Spalling means that concrete fragments have broken off and fallen off the larger concrete structure, said civil engineers.

A visit to the stretch under the bridge — commissioned in 1990 — on Sunday afternoon revealed that an inspection team has marked multiple spots where the concrete broke off or where other interventions will be required. The spots were circled with red lines and white lines.

"The repairs will be start-

ed this week. We will also conduct a load test of the bridge to assess its health. We have already tested the concrete's strength, hardness and compactness," said a source in the KMDA.

The bridge will be completely shut down for traffic for some time, possibly at night, for the load test.

KMDA sources said a complete health assessment of the bridge was underway and the fire happened in the meantime.

When the team of engineers from the KMDA and external experts went for inspections for the health assessment, they could not inspect the underbelly of the bridge because of encroachment, said a KMDA source.

Ire over tigress shift

► FROM PAGE 8

on November 25, Jamuna was released in the core area of Jenabil in the tiger reserve on November 9. After a few days, both abandoned the Similipal Tiger Reserve.

Zeenat crossed the Odisha border and moved into Jharkhand on December 5. For 24 days, she had kept forest officials in Odisha, Jharkhand and Bengal on their toes and was finally captured from Bankura in Bengal on December 30.

Jamuna continues to move between the Similipal Tiger Reserve and the Kuliha Tiger Reserve in Balasore. But she is mostly confined within the Similipal landscape.

The officials are worried about Zeenat's safety, given the failure of the first inter-state tiger project in Sat-

koshia. In 2018, as part of the inter-state tiger relocation programme, a male tiger and a tigress were relocated from Madhya Pradesh to the Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha's Angul district.

The male tiger, Kanha, was released in the Satkosia reserve on July 6, 2018, and the female, Sundari, was released on August 17, 2018. Both were around three then.

Kanha was found dead on October 14, 2018. The findings of a preliminary investigation indicated that the death was linked to poaching.

Sundari was brought to an enclosure on November 6, 2018, after the tigress had allegedly mauled two persons inside the sanctuary. She was sent back to Madhya Pradesh in March 2021.

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क्र.सं.	आईडेंटिफिकेशन संख्या / पैकेज संख्या	कार्य का नाम	प्राक्कलित राशि (लाख में)	अंश में	कार्य समाप्ति की तिथि / अवधि	टेन्डर कोल
1	EE/RWD/DALTONGANJ / 1/15/2024-25	सोरकोहा मेन रोड से कोला मोहोर पथ तक पथ निर्माण । 2.80कि०मी०	308.214	तीन करोड़ आठ लाख एकसीस हजार चार सौ रू० मात्र	12 माह	द्वितीय

2.नेवसाईट में निविदा प्रकाशन की तिथि : 04.01.2025
3.ई-निविदा प्राप्ति की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय : 18.01.2025 up to 5.00 PM
4.निविदा खोलने की तिथि एवं समय 20.01.2025 पूर्वाह्न 3.30 बजे
5.निविदा आमंत्रित करने वाले पदाधिकारी का नाम एवं पता : कार्यपालक अभियंता, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, कार्य प्रमण्डल, डालटनगंज ।
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PR 343266 (Rural Development)24-25*D

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ई-अल्पकालीन पुनर्निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना
ई०-अल्पकालीन पुनर्निविदा संख्या:-19/2024-25/RI/RWD/EE/GODDA, दिनांक: 30-12-2024
कार्य का विवरण:-मुख्यमंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना अन्तर्गत कार्यपालक अभियंता, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग,कार्य प्रमण्डल, गोड्डा द्वारा निम्न विवरण के अनुसार e-procurement पद्धति से निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है ।

क्रम सं०	आईडेंटिफिकेशन संख्या/ पैकेज संख्या	कार्य का नाम	प्राक्कलित राशि (रुपये में)	अंश में	कार्य समाप्ति की तिथि / अवधि	टेन्डर कोल
1	RWD/EE/GODDA / 80/2023-24	तिलयापाड़ा से बोकडोबाड़ी भाया हल्दीसोल तक पथ का निर्माण कार्य (ल० 4.500 कि०मी०)	5,73,67,000.00	पौच करोड़ तेहत्तर लाख सड़सठ हजार रू० मात्र	15(पन्द्रह) माह	द्वितीय
2	RWD/EE/GODDA / 01/2024-25	राजदाहा मुख्य पथ सामपुर से अमजोरा होते हुए राहड़ी तक पथ निर्माण कार्य (ल०-4.050 कि०मी०)	5,66,36,700.00	पौच करोड़ पचासठ लाख छत्तीस हजार सात सौ रू० मात्र	15(पन्द्रह) माह	द्वितीय
3	RWD/EE/GODDA / 35/2024-25	जोजो टोला मुख्य सड़क से गरपु टोला भाया रुन्दे तक पथ निर्माण कार्य (ल०-2.100 कि०मी०), प्रखंड- बोआरीजोर	2,88,43,300.00	दो करोड़ अठारसी लाख तेतासीस हजार तीन सौ रू० मात्र	12(बारह) माह	द्वितीय

1. वेबसाईट में निविदा प्रकाशन की तिथि:- 02.01.2025
2. ई-निविदा प्राप्ति की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय:- 20.01.2025 अपराह्न 5.00 बजे तक ।
3. निविदा खोलने की तिथि एवं समय:-22.01.2025 अपराह्न 11.30 बजे ।
4. निविदा आमंत्रित करने वाले पदाधिकारी का नाम एवं पता:- कार्यपालक अभियंता, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, कार्य प्रमण्डल, गोड्डा ।
5. ई-निविदा प्रकोष्ठ का मोबाईल न०- 9973573276
6. परिमाण विपत्र की राशि घट-बढ़ सकती है तदनुसार अग्रघन की राशि देय होगी ।
7. निविदा शुल्क एवं अग्रघन की राशि केवल OnlineMode द्वारा स्वीकार्य होगी ।
8. निविदा शुल्क एवं अग्रघन की राशि का ई-शुल्क मुद्रातम जिस खाता से किया जायेगा, उसी खाते में अग्रघन की राशि वापस होगी । अगर खाता को बंद कर दिया जाता है तो उसकी सारी जबाबदेही आपकी होगी ।
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System Tender No. 163553, Probable Amount of Contract:- Rs. 181.07 Lakhs (As Per SCR Amended on 22.08.2022)
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BLAME GAME

The sharp economic slowdown in the second quarter — with the pace of growth tumbling to a seven-quarter low of 5.4% in July-September — has come as a huge embarrassment for the Narendra Modi government. So it is not surprising that it is scouting for a scapegoat that it can pin the blame on. Relations between the finance ministry and the Reserve Bank of India have been frosty for a while, especially after the former RBI governor, Shaktikanta Das, and the other members of the Monetary Policy Committee chose to ignore the broad hints from Raisina Hill to cut interest rates and spur growth. The department of economic affairs clearly had its knives out for the RBI when it said in its economic report for November that “the combination of monetary policy stance and macroprudential measures by the central bank may have contributed to the demand slowdown.”

Finance ministry bureaucrats and the sages on Mint Street have been at odds over the conduct of monetary policy for a very long time. The RBI has consistently maintained that the inflation-targeting objective embedded in its policy mandate enjoins it to focus on price stability without imperiling growth. It is a tricky balance but the RBI has managed to do this pretty well. The central bank had embarked on a cycle of rate cuts a year ahead of the Covid pandemic when growth had started to slow but inflation was well within its 2%-6% tolerance band. It would be reckless to adopt the same strategy now when the upside risks to inflation persist. Critics of the Modi government may find it galling that the Centre has ascribed the slowdown in demand to the RBI's macroprudential measures. The RBI has been justifiably alarmed by the surge in unsecured lending by banks. It recently threatened to clamp regulatory restrictions on this category of loans if the banks fail to limit their exposures to unsecured credit. It has also tightened provisioning requirements for banks to head off any looming risk of bad loans. The good news is that gross non-performing assets are down to a 12-year low at 2.6%. The government needs to recognise that demand has slowed because of stagnant wages and elevated household borrowings. The savings rate dipped to a five-year low of 5.2% of GDP in fiscal 2024. The only way out is for the government to increase its capital spending, which the finance minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, is reluctant to do as she struggles to hold fiscal deficit to 4.9% this year. A blame game is the last thing India needs now.

RISK PROOFING

India is experiencing a digital revolution but this transformation comes with its own challenges, such as the surge in cybercrimes. Recent data reveal a troubling trend: between January and April of this year, Indian citizens suffered financial losses exceeding Rs 1,750 crore due to various cyber offenses. During the same period, more than 7,40,000 complaints were filed on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal. It is thus encouraging that insurance companies are now offering policies to safeguard people against cyber fraud. Cyber insurance, available for both corporates and individuals, essentially provides a financial buffer against the crippling costs associated with data breaches and cyber-attacks and can be customised as per the requirement. Unauthorised transactions involving bank accounts, credit or debit cards — these already have a level of protection from banks — are covered and people can even insure themselves against cyber-bullying too. But what is not insured are cases of fraud where there is active participation of the victim — that is, say, if a person falls prey to a hoax call and sends money or personal details oneself. This is termed as ‘gross negligence’ by insurance companies and is excluded from coverage. The digitisation of public services is progressing at an explosive pace but people's awareness of the perils of the process remains sketchy. Can the consumer then be blamed for being unable to tell real from fake? This aspect must be taken into consideration by insurance companies and policy regulators.

Prevention though is better than retrieving losses. India boasts the second-largest population of active internet users. Yet most of them remain inadequately informed about online fraud, leaving them vulnerable to scammers. Threats such as privacy violations and sextortion are also becoming increasingly common. In this rapidly evolving digital world, it is crucial to develop a thorough understanding of cyber risks and take steps to counter them. Awareness campaigns are essential, particularly for new and younger internet users. At the same time, legal gaps must be addressed to prevent such crimes — the Digital Personal Data Protection Data Act passed in 2023 is not enough to protect Indians. There, though, must be a balance between preventing cybercrimes and avoiding excessive regulation. Policy must keep this dimension in mind while framing deterrents.

SCRIPSI

‘The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude.’
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The calendar rehearses death soundlessly

Time tiptoes

SUMANA ROY

My six-year-old niece pronounces ‘entry’ as ‘en-try’; as with all little students, she's been coaxed and pampered with the word, ‘try’. Soon there's another word for her to read: ‘exit’. We are in a mall, where she's tried to read the signages that announce shops and their intent. Both the words are unfamiliar to her — when I tell her their meanings, she's surprised that ‘entry’ and ‘exit’ could be so close to each other, in parallel queues. I look at her — something inside me is coagulating into tears — it'll take her a lifetime to understand and measure the distance between ‘entry’ and ‘exit’ in different spaces: homes, workplaces, relationships. I can't tell her any of this, of course. She's happy with a lollipop that she hopes will never ‘end’.

“How old is the lollipop inside my mouth?” she asks. “When is its birthday?”

Did questions such as these ever occur to those who imagined the calendar as a space to deposit and arrange their time? I say “deposit” because that is what it feels like to me — our insect-life of collecting time, involuntary and yet compulsive. For objects of a certain kind, architecture, and tradition, we use words that treat the accumulated years with the kind of reverence that financial institutions pay to interest earned on money. We are loathe to use such energetic words for humans and other living beings — time seems like a burden, an instinct that is held in a phrase such as ‘take years off’, as if it were something to rid oneself of, like disease. We are not art, which time allows the opportunity to marinate into something more than itself, to become what is called, for instance, a ‘classic’. We are machines, which, with ‘wear and tear’, lose efficiency and function — we have expiry dates. Does the calendar reflect that?

Time is like art — it has no compulsion to pay obeisance to efficiency. I sometimes wonder what the sense of a ‘year’ might have looked like had our form and constitution been like art. Imagine a year that derives its form from, say, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. What might the duration and the units of such a calendar be — day, week, month, year, what other units? What could a calendar look like if it had been structured from the same impulse as a lyric poem? Or the lifespan of a dream? Why does the imagination fail to think of time outside readymade units? To think of the life of a work of art as the length of a calendar year would distort most of the social apparatuses that keep institutions and the stock exchange in power. (Imagine, for instance, what would happen to the ‘school calendar’ if there was no time infrastructure of the kind that runs and codes our lives.)

The logic of calendars is an import from the seasons, the agricultural cycle, the shape and behaviour of the moon,



December

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

the woman's menstrual cycle (which leads us to speculate whether drafts of the kind of calendar we use might have been first created by women, a proposition put forward by the ethno-mathematician, Claudia Zaslavsky, by studying the Ishango Bone from 20,000 years ago), from cycles of abstinence and immersion, attachment and detachment... In a calendar is a rhythm of work and pause, the spine bent working, the head surveying the horizon, the white breath amidst the blue and red traffic signs of numbers imprisoned in squares inside rectangles, as if Time was a Kandinsky canvas. Money, though, has no spine, nor does it need rest. It works tirelessly, even as we sleep — the market is its gym and, if the calendar were to be imagined into being today, its form would derive from the shrewdness of money, which knows neither end nor death, which reproduces by defying all documented manners of reproduction. The mall — and even the corporatised nursing home — feels like that too, indifferent to the pulse of work and waiting, life and leaving. Waiting for my mother's appointment with a doctor in the geriatric wing of a clinic, I try to imagine an adult mayfly's calendar, its lifespan of a day; I also think of Ginkgo biloba trees, some of which can live up to 3,000 years.

The calendar is art, conceptual art that compels us to imagine life and its obverse. It is art that is provocative, but,

because it's gentle and comes to us in the form and structure of numbers, we accept it with the kind of happy resignation that parents accept the growing height of their children. Having come to think of life as a continuous process of rehearsal, not necessarily as preparation but more as repetition, the occasional unease I feel about the calendar perhaps has to do with its form. The calendar rehearses death, but without the sound of crying. We are biologically conditioned to acknowledge the singularity of death; the calendar frustrates that attestation. Moments of grateful ebullience make us sprint towards phrases like ‘a second life’ — the calendar, by returning with variants of the same form, as if Time were a draft that needs annual editing, gives us an intimation of the end, while clarifying why we cannot use a phrase like ‘second death’. We think it is life that gives us our history. It is perhaps death that makes us belong to history. All history is a registering of death, of our extinction, as species and as individuals. It is not that we honour our commitment to history by dying, we only stop being employees of history by retiring from life.

Death must have an audience, like life does. That is why we speculate on the last night of the year, aware that, like the ‘entry’ and ‘exit’ signs on the malls, life and death are neighbours, like the 1st of January is to the 31st of December.

Sumana Roy is a poet and author

Steady rise

■ Sir — Sudheendra Kul-karni's article, “The rising” (Dec 29), which argued that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is the only Indian political organisation that has grown from strength to strength without any split, provided food for thought. The Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India have suffered multiple splits, ideological and organisational, that reduced their relevance in national politics.

The Grand Old Party could not also escape the clutches of hereditary politics, which contributed to its steady decline. The RSS, despite its claim of being a cultural organisation, has sought to shape the political landscape of India by controlling the erstwhile Jana Sangh and now the Bharatiya Janata Party through sister organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram. Its tallest leaders, K.B. Hedgewar, M.S. Golwalkar and V.D. Savarkar, are known to have preached extremist *Hindutva* ideology. Its present chief, Mohan Bhagwat, however, has made efforts to reach out to the Muslim community in a bid to promote social harmony and strengthen national unity. The future of the RSS will now depend on its ability to modify its brand of *Hindutva* politics in accordance with the demands of a secular polity.

Jahar Saha, Calcutta



Love's labour lost

■ Sir — Glow boards proclaiming love for a city or a ward do precious little for a neighbourhood. Perhaps this is why Bapan Badyakar from Siuri, West Bengal, thought it would be alright to steal the illuminated heart from the street installation to declare his love for his wife. When his theft was discovered, Badyakar was given a bouquet of roses by the authorities to give to his wife instead. However, one hopes that now that Badyakar has removed part of the unnecessary glow sign, light will finally dawn on municipal authorities about the uselessness of these decorations. After all, while garish glow signs are eyesores in cities, vast stretches of roads in the suburbs remain dark and dangerous without even street lamps to illuminate them.

Amaresh Maiti, Birbhum

■ Sir — As it celebrates its birth centenary this year, the time has come for the RSS to introspect and adapt itself to the changing social views. It needs to recognise the diversity of India and preach communal harmony. Mohan Bhagwat has recently advised people to stop looking for *mandirs* in mosque complexes. This is a welcome move and might imbue a new kind of ideol-

ogy amongst the *Hindutva* brigade.

Gurnoor Grewal, Chandigarh

Poor remark

■ Sir — Recently, the mayor of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and Trinamool Congress leader, Firhad Hakim, allegedly remarked that with the grace of god,

Muslims could become the majority in India. This is a blow against India's secular ethos. The TMC should be cautious of what its leaders say in public.

K.V. Seetharamaiah, Bengaluru

■ Sir — Firhad Hakim seems unfazed by the backlash caused by his statement in spite of his party censoring him. Has the ruling party in Bengal become so dependent on individual leaders that they are automatically absolved of all sins? Strict action should be taken against Hakim.

Tusar Kanti Kar, Howrah

■ Sir — It is hypocritical of Bharatiya Janata Party leaders to point fingers at Firhad Hakim when almost all of them have engaged in divisive rhetoric in the past (“Trinamool condemns Hakim's remarks”, Dec 17). From labelling Muslims as “*jinke zyada bachhe hain*” to shouting slogans like ‘Go back to Pakistan’, the ruling party has left no



Off the mark

Mind the gap

NITYA NANDA

Income and inequality in human development among the states is a major concern in India. In 1970-71, the *per capita* income of the poorest state, Bihar, was about 63% of the national average. After five decades, in 2020-21, Bihar remained the poorest state but its *per capita* income had fallen further to just about 33% of India's *per capita* income. In the same year, Goa had a *per capita* income that was higher than the Indian average by 62%. In 2020-21, Goa's *per capita* was more than three times the national average. In 1970-71, aside from Delhi, the richest states' *per capita* incomes were roughly 2.5 times of those of the poorest states; now it is 10 times of those of the poorest states. Clearly, inter-state income inequality has increased substantially.

It is not just Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand that are falling behind. West Bengal's *per capita* income was higher than the Indian average by about 15% in 1970-71 but it fell below the Indian average by about 18% in 2020-21. Assam's *per capita* income was below the Indian average by about 10% in 1970-71 but has fallen to about 69% of the Indian average in 2020-21.

Concerns have also been expressed by the southern states in particular regarding the inclusion of population as a criterion for fiscal transfer fearing that the states that have done well in terms of population control would be penalised. The 15th Finance Commission has included a criterion on demographic performance. However, southern and western states are demanding the dilution of the income-distance criterion as well. If this is done, inter-state disparities will increase further. Moreover, fiscal transfer is not the only means through which resource transfers take place. The credit-deposit ratio of scheduled commercial banks was more than 75% in 2023, but the same for the eastern region was less than 50%; it was a lower 40% in the north-eastern region. This indicates that resource transfers are taking place from eastern and northeastern states to other regions.

Nitya Nanda is Director, Council for Social Development, New Delhi

Given this situation, it is important to understand why the poorer states have not been able to catch up despite getting favourable treatment in the devolution of funds from the common tax pool. A state with low income has a lower capability when it comes to raising its own revenue as people spend a larger share of their income on food and other necessities — segments in which there is minimal scope for imposing taxes. Most states — Bihar is one example — pay salaries to their employees at rates that are higher than the market rate and are often beyond their capability.

The Common School System Commission constituted by the Bihar government to explore the possibility of providing free and compulsory school education to all children gave its report in 2007 but it could not be implemented as that would have meant that about half the state budget would have to be spent only on education. No wonder most schools in Bihar do not conform to the standards mandated by the Right to Education Act. Quality education is essential for the economic development of a state. But Bihar has found it difficult to ensure good education for all. The situation of the state's healthcare infrastructure is similar.

It is becoming more difficult to make resources available to poorer states. India needs to reimagine the mechanism of fiscal transfer. One way out could be the Union government taking the financial responsibility for providing education and healthcare to all states even though the responsibility for implementing the same would lie with the states. There is also good reason for providing financial assistance to states for maintaining law and order without taking away their powers. India has been pursuing a policy of priority sector lending. Banks and financial institutions can thus be mandated to advance a minimum percentage of deposits collected from the states. Another equalising mechanism can be the prioritising of infrastructure like highways and railways in the backward states.

Financial devolution might have become a controversial issue unless the Centre takes up more financial responsibilities.

stone unturned to hurt the sentiments of Muslims. Have Hindu leaders not asked people to procreate to outnumber the Muslim population? However, Hakim's alleged remark cannot be supported and the TMC has rightly censured him. The BJP, on the other hand, usually refrains from admonishing its truant leaders, indirectly encouraging their anti-secular remarks.

Kajal Chatterjee, Calcutta

New low

■ Sir — A student was raped within the premises of Anna University in Chennai. The assailant was allegedly affiliated with the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Taking *suo motu* cognisance of the matter, the Madras High Court admonished the Chennai police commissioner, A. Arun, for his handling of the case and raised questions about his conduct during the investigation. The court formed an all-woman special investigation team to probe the assault and the subsequent leak of the first information report, which exposed the survivor's details. A rise in incidents of crime against women in Tamil Nadu might spell doom for the ruling party.

Gopalaswamy J., Chennai

■ Sir — The Tamil Nadu Bharatiya Janata Party president, K. Annamalai, flogged himself to protest against the sexual assault on a student at Anna University and declared that he would not

wear footwear until the DMK government was ousted from power. This is childish. After his earlier gimmicks failed to garner votes for the saffron party, Annamalai has now stooped even lower.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

■ Sir — The BJP has been quick to blame the DMK government regarding incidents of rape and murder in the state. But the BJP cannot accuse the DMK of gross inaction when its lack of sympathy for the women of Manipur and its refusal



Gimmick anew

to take steps to mitigate the situation there have stoked ethnic fires in the state. K. Annamalai's vow to not wear footwear until the DMK is no longer in power in Tamil Nadu is just a gimmick to stay in the political limelight.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

Letters should be sent to:
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Bar and benchmark

High-intensity drinking is more dangerous than bingeing, says Christina Caron

The holidays offer an excuse to gather with loved ones, let loose and indulge in plates loaded with comfort foods. Unapologetic napping. All the pie.

And, for a lot of people, plenty of alcohol.

But heavy drinking is not limited to the holiday season. Nor is it mainly the pastime of college students.

Overall binge drinking rates are now equivalent among young adults and those in midlife. That's because young people, especially young men, are bingeing less — while middle-aged adults are throwing back more alcohol in a single session than they previously did.

We've long been warned about the risks of binge drinking, usually defined as having four or five drinks in a two-hour span. And now researchers are increasingly focused on a more dangerous pattern of alcohol use that they call high-intensity drinking: consuming eight or more drinks in a row for women and 10 or more drinks in a row for men.

High-intensity drinking is even riskier than binge drinking, and it's on the rise among certain segments of the population.

High-intensity vs binge drinking

The definition of binge drinking stems from the work of Henry Wechsler, a social psychologist at Harvard University, US, who in 1993 tracked alcohol use among college students across the country. He found that young women who reported consuming at least four drinks in a night and men who consumed at least five experienced the most drinking-related problems.

But other researchers noticed that some of the worst consequences associated with binge drinking, such as blackouts and alcohol poisoning, tended to happen when people had much more than four or five drinks.

Over the years, experts have referred to heavier levels of binge drinking in many different ways, including "extreme drinking" and the far less catchy "extreme ritualistic alcohol consumption".



In recent years they settled on "high-intensity drinking".

Who consumes eight or 10 drinks in a row?

Heavy drinking has long been associated with youth but trends are changing.

Since 2005, the Monitoring the Future survey, which tracks the behaviour of American adolescents through adulthood, has asked people aged 19 to 30 how often they have engaged in high-intensity drinking over the previous two weeks.

The survey found that high-intensity drinking decreased to 8.5 per cent of study subjects in 2023, from about 11 per cent in 2013.

But "while the prevalence is coming down, it is still high", particularly for those in their late 20s, said George F. Koob, the director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Nearly one in eight people aged 27 and 28 regularly consumes 10 or more drinks in a night, according

to the latest data from 2023.

The National Alcohol Survey series, which collects data from the general population, defines high-intensity drinking as the consumption of at least eight drinks in a row by anyone, male or female, over the previous 12 months.

The survey's latest analysis, which does not include data beyond the year 2020, also showed a decline in high-intensity drinking among young adults overall. But its frequency among men aged 30 and older and women aged 18 to 64 has increased, said Camilla Lui, a scientist at the Alcohol Research Group who crunched the data.

Problems associated with high-intensity drinking

Experts who study the effects of alcohol said it was worth distinguishing between bingeing and high-intensity drinking because the latter comes with heavier consequences.

Consuming eight or 10 drinks

in a short period of time can produce a blood alcohol concentration or BAC of over 0.2 per cent, "which significantly increases the risk of injuries, overdose and deaths", Koob said.

For comparison, a regular binge (four or five drinks) typically results in a BAC of around 0.08 per cent.

High-intensity drinkers are also more likely to experience a "full blackout", with zero recall of what transpired, or to end up in the emergency room, "grossly intoxicated and a danger to themselves and others", said Keith Humphreys, an addiction expert and psychologist at Stanford University, US. When people drink that much, "the risk of harm goes up pretty dramatically", he added.

In addition, a higher number of drinks per occasion is associated with a greater likelihood of developing alcohol use disorder, Koob said.

And "high-intensity drinking doesn't just harm the drinker", Lui said. It can lead to physical assaults, drunken-driving acci-

dents, property damage and relationship problems, she added.

There are many reasons someone might abuse alcohol, from a genetic disposition to self-medicating.

But when it comes to high-intensity drinking, studies have found that young people were largely motivated by the expectation that it would make them more social and help them have fun with friends. And that, for them, outweighed any potential negative consequences.

The National Alcohol Survey has shown that middle-aged and older adults drink during social events, too, but they also reported using drinking as a way to deal with stress, Lui said.

More research is needed to fully unpack why some age groups are gravitating toward this more extreme form of bingeing. Because while five drinks is risky, it's not the same as 10, Humphreys said.

"The dose makes the poison," he added.

NYTNS

Are earbuds hurting your hearing?



DR GITA MATHAI

Sound of music

I listen to music for hours using earbuds. I get ringing sounds in the left ear. I also hear outside sounds muffled. I am 23 years old.

While inserting the earbuds you may have inadvertently pushed the ear wax deep into the ear causing an impaction. An ENT surgeon will be able to figure this out and remove any impacted wax. Also, your hearing may need to be evaluated. Constant use of earbuds at high volume can damage the inner ear and eventually lead to hearing loss.

Sneaky stroke

My grandmother suddenly developed weakness on one side of her body. She can walk but is very agitated and imagines things.

She may have had a stroke. Although it usually causes sudden weakness on one side, women may experience agitation or hallucinations too. Evaluate for risk factors like diabetes, hypertension and elevated lipids. Do consult a physician.

Self-testing

I am diabetic and need blood sugar tests. The phlebotomist has difficulty in finding my veins.

It may be easier if you buy a glucometer and do the tests yourself. This involves a finger prick only. Write down the fasting and post prandial values, and show them to your physician. Also, follow your diabetic diet with appropriate calorie restriction and walk for 30 minutes a day.

Rising cholesterol

My cholesterol level is high even though I am a vegetarian who eats eggs.

A high level of cholesterol can occur even in vegetarians because of

increasing age, a family history of elevated lipids or cholesterol, obesity and an inactive lifestyle without exercise. Also, more than meat, trans and saturated fats that may be used for cooking can elevate lipids. Try to use only 500ml of unsaturated oil per month per person. Cholesterol-rich foods like eggs have only a small effect on total blood cholesterol levels.

Milk trouble

I have stomach cramps whenever I drink milk, or even have milk tea or coffee. I used to drink milk when I was younger.

Indians can develop relative milk intolerance as they age. They are unable to fully digest the sugar (lactose) in milk. This leads to pain, diarrhoea, gas and bloating. It is a harmless but an uncomfortable condition. You may be able to tolerate partially digested milk like curd.

Weight loss

I took a herbal natural weight loss powder. I lost a lot of weight but developed palpitations and sweating. Once I stopped the powder, I regained the lost weight.

The problem with herbal medication is that the ingredients are not listed or controlled. The powder may have contained the natural precursor form of the hormone ephedrine that stimulates the thyroid. Both of these can produce the side effects you described. Consult a physician and work on diet and exercise for weight loss. There are surgeries for weight loss and some allopathic medications like Semaglutide. All these have side effects. Consult a doctor and figure out what is best for you.

Constipation in children

My 3-year-old is constipated. The paediatrician did not give laxatives but ran a lot of tests and said she is normal. Please advise.

Try reducing her milk consumption to 400ml a day. Increase her water intake to 1.5l daily. Ensure she eats two fruits a day. Make her run around the house or on the terrace for 30 minutes a day. Physical activity helps bowel movement.

The writer has a family practice at Vellore and is the author of *Staying Healthy in Modern India*. If you have any question on health issues please write to yourhealthgm@yahoo.co.in



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NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

E-tender invited from experienced and financially sound contractor/agency for the following work.


Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated cost (In Rs.)	Estimate Money (In Rs.)	Time of completion	Cost of tender documents (In Rs.)	Last date for online submission of Tender
1.	Supplying and installation of street light at the road between type VII (new) and new type V quarter upto the entrance of married scholar hostel at NIT Silchar	6,68,223/-	13321/-	60 Days	1000/-	
2.	Providing Electrical power points for AC's installed at FCF department at NIT Silchar	10,29,604/-	20592/-	60 Days	1000/-	16/1/2025 up to 2.00 P.M
3.	Electrical related works to provide main power supply at grade IV quarters at NIT Silchar	6,63,599/-	13372/-	60 Days	1000/-	
4.	Replacement of Underground electrical cables installed at K.V NIT Silchar	6,95,408/-	13903/-	60 Days	1000/-	
5.	Street light repairing work at K.V school at NIT Silchar	8,35,113/-	16702/-	60 Days	1000/-	

The detailed tender notice may be seen at Institute website <http://www.nits.ac.in>, <http://www.tenders.gov.in> & Institute notice board. The tender documents will be available at CPP portal from 03/01/2025

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LIVER CLINIC



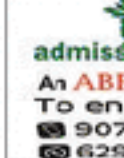
DR. ELANKUMARAN. K
MBBS, MS, MRCS, DNB, MCH (AIIMS), PDF
Senior Consultant, Liver Transplantation & Hepatobiliary Surgery,
Head - Liver Diseases & Transplantation,
Apollo Hospitals, Chennai

Consultation for liver disorders, alcoholic liver disease, liver cancer, fatty liver disease, hepatitis B & C, jaundice, liver cirrhosis, liver transplant, blood vomiting, abdominal distention.

DATE: **Saturday 04th January 2025**

VENUE: **APOLLO HOSPITALS (CHENNAI) REGIONAL OFFICE**
Diamond Prestige Building,
Room No - 405, 4th Floor,
41A, A.J.C Bose Road, Kolkata - 700 017.

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TT Connect Initiative

Who Should Choose Bariatric Surgery?



Dr. Sarfaraz Baig, MS, FRCS, FMBS, FIAGES, FALS, Consultant Gastro Surgeon, Specialist in Bariatric, Hernia, Hiatal, and Colorectal Surgery


For many of us weight loss is desirable for looking good. However, for some, weight loss is mandatory for surviving or getting rid of diseases. Patients who are severely obese (BMI > 40 OR weight > 120 kgs in general) typically fall in this category. Many of them have uncontrolled diabetes where injections and pills are unable to maintain normal blood sugar. They may also have failing organs such as kidney and liver and can require dialysis and cardiac stents. Many have a disease called sleep apnea that leads to poor sleep, lethargy and breathlessness that may require a CPAP machine at night. These patients may develop heart failure and have sudden death. Many complain of painful knees and back leading them to have poor mobility and quality of life. Some may need knee replacement. Finally, many have poor self-esteem and confidence leading to poor prospect in jobs and relationships. These categories of patients stand to benefit maximally from bariatric surgery which is a laparoscopic surgery that involves 4-5 tiny holes and one day of hospital stay. Patients would lose 30% of their weight over a year. Not only that, diseases such as diabetes, sleep apnea, arthritis and psychological issues get corrected dramatically. Medical treatment in the form of dieting, exercises and drugs rarely give this excellent outcome. Unsurprisingly therefore, recent global guidelines strongly recommend bariatric surgery for patients with severe obesity especially with diabetes, sleep apnea, and arthritis.



Digestive Surgery Clinic
Digestive Surgery Clinic
Phone: 9830006067 / 9830751420 / 9830157840
Address: 7B, Short Street, Kolkata - 700017
info@digestivesurgeryclinic.com
www.digestivesurgeryclinic.com

TT Connect Initiative

Alcohol-Induced Chronic Pancreatitis: Elucidating Risks and Consequences



Dr. Debasis Datta, Director of Gastroenterology, Fortis Hospital.

Chronic pancreatitis is a debilitating condition characterized by persistent inflammation of the pancreas, leading to irreversible scarring and damage, it may cause severe health complications, says **Dr. Debasis Datta**, Director of Gastroenterology, Fortis Hospital.

Pancreatitis occurs when the pancreas becomes inflamed, and it is classified as acute or chronic based on the duration and frequency of inflammation. Chronic pancreatitis may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer. It is often caused by long-term alcohol abuse accounting for approximately 70% of cases. Other contributing factors include gallstone, autoimmune disorders, narrow pancreatic ducts, ductal blockages, high blood calcium levels (hypercalcemia) and high blood triglyceride levels (hypertriglyceridemia). The main symptom of chronic pancreatitis is abdominal pain. The pain can be sudden and severe or you may experience more mild episodes of pain. For some patients, the pain is constant.

Other symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Fatty stool
- Glucose intolerance
- Chronic diarrhoea
- Back pain

Alcohol consumption significantly increases the risk of developing chronic pancreatitis, with smoking exacerbating this risk. A family history of the same condition may also predispose individuals to chronic pancreatitis.


Diagnostic tests for chronic pancreatitis may include:

- Abdominal X-rays
- Ultrasounds
- CT scans
- MRI scans
- Endoscopic ultrasound (EUS)

Treatment for chronic pancreatitis focuses on managing pain and improving digestive function. While pancreatic damage cannot be reversed, proper care can alleviate symptoms. Treatment options may include medication, endoscopic therapies, or surgery. Endoscopic treatment is often performed to extract stones and insert stent to relieve pain. It is essential for individuals diagnosed with chronic pancreatitis to avoid alcohol consumption and smoking, as these habits can increase the risk of pancreatic cancer. You may need to limit the amount of fat in your diet and take vitamins.

Help line: 8585030388


RISES IN THE EAST



The Telegraph
Rising to go
The master shows out speculation on the rise
Why agents of change are often good at what they do

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CALCUTTA WEDNESDAY 1 JANUARY 2025



XXCE

IN BRIEF

Deepti enters top 5

■ **DUBAI:** India off-spinner Deepti Sharma climbed a place to be at fifth spot in the latest ICC women's ODI ranking for bowlers following her match-winning performances in the recent series against the West Indies at home. **rn**

Southgate honour

■ **LONDON:** Former England football manager Gareth Southgate and Paris Olympics 800m gold medalist Keely Hodgkinson were among those named in King Charles's New Year honours list published on Monday. Southgate receives a knighthood while Hodgkinson gets the Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). **Reuters**

IOA recognition

■ **NEW DELHI:** The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has given recognition to the Indian Golf Union led by Harish Kumar Reddy while declaring the other body, headed by Brijinder Singh, void. **rn**

Rooney fired

■ **LONDON:** Wayne Rooney was fired as Plymouth Argyle coach on Tuesday after just seven months in charge of the struggling Championship team. The 39-year-old former England and Manchester United striker was hired in May and departs with Plymouth last in the English second tier with four wins in 23 games this season. **AP/PTI**

Ko a Dame

■ **WELLINGTON:** Lydia Ko has been made a Dame in the New Year's honours list in New Zealand for her services to golf. Ko is the youngest New Zealander at age 27 to receive the honour. **AP/PTI**

Schools' cricket

■ **CALCUTTA:** Don Bosco School Liluah and Assembly Of God Church School won their respective matches in the SLOBA Inter-school Invitational T20 cricket tournament on Monday. In Category A (U-13) Don Bosco Liluah defeated DPS Joka by 10 wickets while in Category B (U-15) Assembly Of God Church beat St Lawrence High School by 4 wickets. **Our Bureau**

THIS DAY THAT YEAR

1967: The second day's play of the India-West Indies Test at Eden Gardens is cancelled as spectators clash with police and set fire to the stands leading to an infamous riot.

2014: New Zealand's Corey Anderson hits the then fastest ODI century, off just 36 balls in a shortened game against the West Indies in Queens-town, breaking Shahid Afridi's 37-ball ton scored in 1996. Anderson goes on to score an unbeaten 131 off 47 balls and New Zealand win the match by 159 runs.

2017: Vidarba, coached by Chandrakant Pandit, win their maiden Ranji Trophy title, defeating Delhi by nine wickets in Indore.

TEST TEAM OF THE YEAR

Jasprit Bumrah has been chosen to lead Cricket Australia's 'standout XI' for the year 2024 and includes only two Australians. Six countries have been represented in the team with Yashasvi Jaiswal being the only other Indian to feature in the side. Australia captain Pat Cummins doesn't find a place in the 'team', which has Josh Hazlewood and Matt Henry as the other two fast bowlers. Bumrah has claimed 71 wickets in 13 Tests during the calendar year, the best haul since Dale Steyn's 74 wickets in 2008. The fast bowler has already 'torched' Australia with 30 wickets in four Tests on the current tour. This is the team:



Yashasvi Jaiswal



Ben Duckett



Joe Root



Rachin Ravindra



Harry Brook



Kamindu Mendis



Alex Carey



Matt Henry



Jasprit Bumrah (captain)



Josh Hazlewood



Keshav Maharaj

Gill riddle for Team India in final game

SAYAK BANERJEE

Calcutta: The "Prince of Indian cricket", as Shubman Gill is often referred to, seems to be finding himself in a strange situation in the Indian cricket kingdom at present.

It's not often that an established batsman gets dropped from the XI for a Test and that too, on a tour of Australia. But in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy, continuity in the final XI has been the last thing as far as the Indian team management is concerned.



Shubman Gill during the second Test at the Adelaide Oval. (Getty Images)

Following the 295-run win in the series opener in Perth, India's XI has had a tweak in all the next three Tests in Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne. The just-concluded Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground saw the omission of Gill, which did raise a few eyebrows.

In Gill's place, spinner all-rounder Washington Sundar, who had featured in the opening Test, returned to the XI. India wanted to give an "extra bit of cushion" to their bowling for the fourth Test, something captain Rohit Sharma said after the 184-run loss in Melbourne on Monday.

One may find the skipper's view on the matter justified. But more than bowling, it's batting that has troubled India

on most occasions in this series and the primary reason behind the visitors trailing 1-2 with just one more game left.

The final Test in Sydney, beginning on Friday, is a must-win game for India in order to keep their World Test Championship final hopes alive. So, will it be wise on India's part to bring Gill back in the XI and bolster their batting, particularly with the SCG track being batter-friendly and usually assisting spinners on the last two days?

Gill's numbers so far in the series aren't too inspiring, though, as he tallies just 60 runs in three innings. Besides, dropping Washington again to accommodate the No.3 batter won't be fair on the all-rounder. Had he not stitched together a 127-run eighth-wicket stand with Nitish Kumar Reddy, the margin of defeat could have been more embarrassing for India in Melbourne.

However, with Rohit and Virat Kohli struggling for runs, adding a specialist batter in the top four may give a little bit of cushion to the batting force. But then, who will Gill replace?

"Benching (pacer) Akash Deep and bringing Gill in his place is definitely one option," a BCCI official told *The Telegraph* on Tuesday.

"Yes, by doing so, the team will be one specialist bowler short. But then, when you have two quicks (Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj) and as many spinners (Ravindra Jadeja and Washington) along with a seamer all-rounder (Reddy), it's quite fair if you look to strengthen your batting."

Having said that, India's sticking to the MCG XI for the final Test cannot be ruled out either. The conditions in Sydney will certainly have a bearing on the combination they decide to go with. More so, if the SCG surface looks a tad greener than usual.



Team India players celebrating New Year in Sydney on Tuesday, in a picture posted on X

Aussies sweat over Starc fitness

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta: Australia are worried about Mitchell Starc's fitness ahead of the Sydney Test which begins on Friday.

The fast bowler sent down 131.2 overs in the four Tests against India despite carrying a painful rib concern for most of the Boxing Day match in Melbourne.

Australia bowled more balls in Melbourne than they have in any Test since the 2022-23 home summer opener against the West Indies in Perth. With only three days to recover in between, the hosts have been extremely careful with the fitness of their fast bowlers.

So much so that some of the battle-weary players opted for celebratory protein shakes over winners' beers in Melbourne on Monday.

"A couple of boys won't have a beer," Cummins said after the 184-run win over India on Monday. "Some others might not (and opt instead for) water and some protein shakes and an early night."

Cummins was bullish that Starc would be fit to play his home Test despite acknowledging that his injury had left

him wincing at the start of each spell before he warmed up. Coach Andrew McDonald is also cautious.

"We'll see how everyone recovers," McDonald said. "Clearly, bowling last, it was a pretty attritional game, something that we're not used to in the last few years."



Mitchell Starc during the ongoing series. (Reuters)

"We'll see how the bodies are. Clearly 'Starc' is carrying something of some description. We'll assess that. But other than that, it looks as though we got through pretty well unscathed."

"Short turnaround, recovery is important, and we'll assess what the team looks like in Sydney based upon the surface, as we always do."

Bumrah to be rested vs England

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta: Jasprit Bumrah is likely to be rested during England's limited overs tour of India, which includes five T20Is and three ODIs. The T20I series begins with a match at Eden Gardens on January 22, 2025.

Sources told *The Telegraph* that the selection committee has decided to rest Bumrah as part of his workload management ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy which begins from February 19.

The fast bowler has already bowled 141.2 overs in four Test matches in Australia and has struggled a bit with his fitness in the hot and sultry conditions. Rohit Sharma has already acknowledged the risks of overbowling Bumrah at the end of the Melbourne Test.

"...if somebody is in such great form, you want to try and maximise that form and that is what we've been trying to do with Bumrah," Rohit said. "There comes a time when you need to step back a little bit and give him that little bit of extra breather as well. So we've been very careful."

Head's 'finger on the ice' moment

Melbourne: Australia batter Travis Head has explained his unusual celebration after dismissing Rishabh Pant in the Boxing Day Test, stating it signifies "finger on the ice", a quirky gesture that he first showed during the tour of Sri Lanka.

After batting through an entire session, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant appeared poised to guide India to a draw on the final day of the Boxing Day Test on Monday.

However, Head turned the game on its head by dismissing Pant, which triggered a dramatic Indian collapse and paved the way for a 184-run Australian victory, giving the hosts a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

Pant mistimed a pull shot and was caught at long-on,

after which Head celebrated the moment with his distinctive gesture of folding the fingers of his left hand into a circle and dipping the forefinger of his right hand into it.

"Finger on the ice. I started in Sri Lanka. I put my finger on the ice and be ready to go for the next one," Head told 'Triple M Radio' after the Melbourne Test.

"I didn't expect to be bowling. I thought Galle would be my next bowling. I'll put it down in a little cup of ice, be ready to go up there next," he added.

Head's celebration quickly gained attention and went viral on social media. After the match, Australian captain Pat Cummins was asked about it and he offered a lighthearted explanation.



Travis Head's 'finger on the ice' celebration (right) after dismissing Rishabh Pant on the final day of the Melbourne Test on Monday has drawn varied reactions. "I put my finger on the ice and be ready to go for the next one," Head, however, said after the Test. (AP)

"I can explain it. It's his finger so hot he's got to put in a cup of ice. Yeah, that's what it is," Cummins told reporters. "So, that's normally the running joke. It was in the Gabba or somewhere he got a

wicket as well and just straight to the fridge, grabs a bucket of ice, puts his finger in and just walks in front of Lino (Nathan Lyon)...just like that (he) thinks it's very funny."

"So that's what it would

have been, nothing else."

However, Head's celebration didn't sit well with former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu, who demanded "stringent action" against the Australian player, calling it "obnoxious".

"Travis head's obnoxious behaviour during the course of the Melbourne test doesn't auger well for the gentleman's game...sets the worst possible example when there are kids, women, young & old watching the game."

"...this caustic conduct did not insult an individual but a nation of 1.5 billion Indians...stringent punishment that would serve as a deterrent for the future generations needs to be slapped on him so that no one dares follow suit!!!" Sidhu posted on X. **PTI**

Forget PR, play good cricket: MS

New Delhi: Mahendra Singh Dhoni has never been a great fan of social media and the two-time World Cup-winning captain thinks it is "good cricket" that matters most in a player's career.

"I have never been a big fan of social media, throughout I had different managers and they used to keep me pushing."

"I started playing in 2004, so Twitter and Instagram were getting popular and the managers were saying you should do some PR build, this and that, but I had the same answer...if I play good cricket I don't need PR," Dhoni said on the latest episode of 'Tread Talks' of Eurogrip Tyres.

"So it was always if I have something I will put it if I don't have I won't. I take stress away, I am not worried about who has how many followers,



Mahendra Singh Dhoni in Ranchi earlier this year. (PTI)

who is doing what because I know if I take care of cricket then everything else will take care of itself."

The 43-year-old who retired from international cricket in August 2020 is gearing up to play in his 18th sea-

son of the IPL and he admitted it's not easy to maintain peak fitness.

"I am not fit as I used to be, lot of efforts now needs to be there on what you are eating and I am doing very specific things to be fit for cricket. We are not fast bowlers so our requirements are not that intense."

"What really helps me is playing a lot of sports in between eating and going to the gym. So whenever I get time I like to play a lot of different sports, maybe tennis, badminton, football, that keeps me engaged. That's the best way of being in touch with fitness," he said.

Dhoni, one of India's most successful captains, never missed international cricket and felt he has been able to do his bit to make his country proud. He led India in 60 Test

matches, winning 27, losing 18 with 15 ending in draws.

"I thought I will get more time, but sadly, I haven't got much time. I didn't miss international cricket because I always believe you know you think about everything then you take a decision."

"Once you have taken a decision no point really thinking about that. So I am very happy with God's grace whatever I was able to do for my country."

The wicketkeeper-batter added: "Other than that it has been fun. I have been able to spend a lot of time with friends, I can do a lot more motorcycle rides, not the long ones, that's something very close to my heart."

"It has been good, family time, daughter questioning when you are coming back."

Written with PTI inputs

Pradipta & Sayan show helps Bengal top group

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta: Pradipta Pramanik's all-round show and Sayan Ghosh's flier were key to Bengal's 24-run victory over Kerala in their Vijay Hazare Trophy clash at the NexGen Cricket ground in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

VIJAY HAZARE

Left-arm spinner Pramanik's unbeaten 74 off 82 balls and 1/35 off his 10 overs, along with medium-pacer Ghosh's 5/33, were massive in Bengal defending a modest 207-run target. With this win, Bengal went on top of Group E with 14 points from four matches.

Pramanik took the crease when Bengal were reeling at 91/6 in the 26th over after



Mumbai's Ayush Mhatre, in a picture shared on Instagram.

being put in. The 26-year-old Pramanik remained calm and with No.11 Ghosh doing his best to not give his wicket away, the pair stitched an unbeaten 35 to push Bengal to 206/9 in the allotted 50 overs.

"No matter what the situation was, I had to remain positive and look to score because that's how the approach should be in limited-overs

cricket," Pramanik said later.

Mumbai player record

Elsewhere in Ahmedabad, Mumbai's Ayush Mhatre set a world record for the youngest player to score 150-plus in List A cricket during their Vijay Hazare Trophy game against Nagaland, bettering statemate Yashasvi Jaiswal's effort.

He clubbed 11 sixes and 15 fours to hit 181, powering his side to 403/7 in 50 overs.

At 17 years and 168 days, Mhatre broke the previous record set by Jaiswal, who was 17 years and 291 days when he did so against Jharkhand in 2019.

Brief scores: Bengal 206/9 in 50 ovs (Pradipta Pramanik 74 n.o.; MD Nidheesh 3/46); Kerala 162 in 46.5 ovs (Sayan Ghosh 5/33; Mukesh Kumar 2/27). Bengal won by 24 runs.

On the roster in the new year

SAYAK BANERJEE,
ANGSHUMAN ROY &
ELORA SEN

As the new year dawns with its hopes, dreams, and expectations, **The Telegraph** takes a look at some of the major sporting events.

Mini-World Cup

The venue-related uncertainty finally over, India's ICC Champions Trophy campaign will be in Dubai and there should be some relief over not having to travel to Pakistan. The conditions in Dubai aren't at all unfamiliar to the Indian cricketers, while decent crowd support too should be begging them on to bring out their A-game, especially during critical situations. India begin their campaign in this 50-overs-a-side contest on February 20 against Bangladesh.



Ben Stokes

Obviously, their clash against arch-rivals Pakistan on February 23 will be India's most-awaited one in the competition, though the former haven't quite been able to match up with India's on-field abilities in recent times. On paper, India are a good mile or two ahead of Pakistan. In fact, their toughest game could be that against New Zealand on March 2, with the Black Caps being the more disciplined and consistent side than both Pakistan and Bangladesh. Besides, in ICC events, New Zealand tend to lift their game to another level, making sure to reach the last-four stage at least.

From Group A, India and New Zealand seem to be the favourites to make the semi-finals. However, it remains to be seen, though, as to how many among the current crop of senior players continue till the Champions Trophy as the remainder of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia still have a fair bit to reveal. The team selected for the upcoming home limited-overs matches against England will also be an indication.

Among the other teams in the Champions Trophy, Group B appears to be the 'group of death' featuring Australia, England, South Af-

rica and Afghanistan. Count the Afghans out at your own peril, especially after their upset wins over England and Pakistan in the 2023 ODI World Cup, which was followed by a semi-final finish in the 2024 T20 World Cup.

Best in Test

The World Test Championship final, slated from June 11-15 at Lord's, will be witnessing South Africa as one of the contestants. But who will be joining the Proteas at Lord's?



Pat Cummins

Australia are certainly the firm favourites to do so, considering their 2-1 lead over India in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy Down Under. India aren't out of contention yet, as they must win the fifth and final Test in Sydney to keep their prospects of making the final alive.

But then, India have to hope Australia drop both their Tests in Sri Lanka or lose the series.

However, all eyes will be on the

South Africans as they get yet another chance to win a world event after coming perilously close to winning the 2024 T20 World Cup final against India, only to mess up in the last four overs of the game. What could give South Africa an edge in this WTC final is their pace bowling unit, which is tenacious and can rip through a batting order if conditions are pacer-friendly.

The only thing South Africa need to look after is their batting department, which still wears a vulnerable look.

English summer

For the first time since the 2002 series, James Anderson, who retired in May 2024, will not be on the field in any of the India-England Tests when both teams face off in a five-match series from June to August. The highest wicket-taker among quicks in Tests, though, could still play a part during those Tests against India if he decides to continue as England's bowling mentor.

For India, this series, which will also be their first official 2025-27 World Test Championship cycle, could well mark the beginning of a new journey in Test cricket depending on how things transpire in the upcoming final Test against Australia in Sydney. Nonetheless, whether India play the series under a new captain or not, the focus will certainly be on

how well Yashasvi Jaiswal adjusts in what would be his first tour of England. The left-hander hasn't done badly in his maiden Australia tour with a century and a couple of fifties so far.

For England, despite the conditions, it will be interesting to see how the young quicks like Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse and Matthew Potts - with Mark Wood likely to spearhead the attack - fare against an Indian line-up consisting of several stroke-makers. England are also confident of Jofra Archer playing in a Test or two against India.

However, they would seriously pray for the return of captain Ben Stokes by then. Stokes, following the New Zealand tour, is down with a recurring hamstringing issue which requires surgery as well.

Bazball Down Under

The last time England had won an Ashes series was back in 2015 at home. Will they be able to regain the Urn when the clash resumes from November 21 in Perth? Or, will the Australians retain it once again?

Even though the Australians couldn't beat England in England, they still managed to draw the series in 2019 and 2023. At home, England have been their easy prey in recent times.

That said, one is eager to find out the bowling attack Australia go with in the 2025 Ashes. Will captain Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood form the pace trio with Nathan Lyon being the lone spinner, or will there be any tweak? These bowlers aren't getting any younger, though.

For the England pacers, the task won't be too easy in Australian conditions as

they rely a fair amount on swing. In that case, Wood and Archer will have a huge role to play and so does promising young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, if selected.

How well Bazball fares in Australia is another interesting prospect. Openers Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett, for sure, will try to go after the Australian bowlers, but the key for England will be the form of Joe Root and Harry Brook.

Fifa Club World Cup

The 2025 Fifa Club World Cup will be played in the US from June 14 to July 13. It will be the first under an expanded format with 32 teams, including the winners of the four previous continental championships. Lionel Messi's Inter Miami are one of the participating teams. A total of 12 venues will be used to host the 63 matches which will be played across the United States, with the final to be played at MetLife Stadium in New York New Jersey and the opening match at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium. Teams like Real Madrid, Manchester United, Bayern Munich, Chelsea and Neymar's Al Hilal will be seen in action.

Focus on Neeraj

The World Athletics Championship will be held in Tokyo from September 13 to 21. Neeraj Chopra will defend his title and is expected to face stiff competition from Paris Olympic gold medalist Arshad Nadeem and bronze medal winner Anderson Peters. Neeraj has roped in Jan Zelezny of the Czech Republic, a three-time Olympic gold medalist and the current world record holder as his new coach after his long-term German guide Klaus Bartonietz took retirement. "It was an injury-plagued year but the injury is fine now, I will be 100 per cent fit for the



Neeraj Chopra

new season," Neeraj said recently. "Technical issues are also there but we will work on them. I will look to improve my technique." The World Athletics Championship will be Neeraj's first major test after his silver medal-winning feat at the Paris Olympic Games.

Chess test

The Women's Chess World

Cup will be held in Batumi, Georgia from July 5 to 29. Fide, the game's world governing body, is yet to announce the dates and venue for the open World Cup. Magnus Carlsen is the defending champion and India's Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa finished runner-up. India will host the fifth leg of the women's grand prix series from April 13 to 24.



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi

Hoping for an impact

The 29th edition of the World Championships will be held in Paris from August 25 to 31. India, whose best moment in badminton in 2024 was the triumph of the women's team at the Badminton Asia Team Championship, will be looking to make some impact at the Paris tournament. The team of Anmol Kharb, Treasa Jolly, Gayatri Gopichand and the talismanic PV Sindhu won India's maiden continental team title in February. But the rest of the year hardly saw any major success, with the Paris Olympics being specially disappointing. So the likes of Lakshya Sen, Sindhu and Prannoy and doubles pairs of Treasa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will definitely want to put up a worthy perfor-

mance at the world meet in Paris. However, apart from Shetty-Rankireddy (who are at present ranked 9th), no other Indian features among the top 10.

New League

The year after the Olympic Games is generally seen as a lean phase in shooting. The next Olympic cycle will begin in the latter part of 2026. The talk in the shooting world is the new Shooting League of India conceptualised by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) in the style of IPL. The league has received the nod from the International Shooting Sport Federation. This will add to the glut of franchise-based leagues in other disciplines that have sprouted in the country following IPL's roaring success. The auction is slated for March and the league is likely to be held in June. Superstar Manu Bhaker will be the

MAJOR EVENTS

- Feb 19-March 9: Champions Trophy cricket (in Pakistan & Dubai)
- June 11-15: World Test Championship final (Lord's)
- June 14-July 13: Fifa Club World Cup in the US
- June 20-Aug 4: India's cricket tour of England
- July 5-29: Fide Women's World Cup chess in Batumi (Georgia)
- Aug 15-Sept 15: Women's World Cup cricket in India
- Aug 25-31: World Badminton Championships in Paris (France)
- Sept 5-12: World Archery Championships (Gwangju, South Korea)
- Sept 13-21: World Athletics in Tokyo (Japan)
- Sept 13-21: World Wrestling in Zagreb (Croatia)
- November 21-January 8 (2026): The Ashes (in Australia)

main attraction. NRAI will also host the Junior World Cup in September.

Sanaya for the Stakes

STAR RACER

Calcutta: There is nothing that sounds louder and sweeter than hoofbeats on the lush green lawns of RCTC on the New Year's Day. And Wednesday is not going to be any exception. Therefore, the expected large crowd will have plenty to cheer about in the afternoon's nine-event race card.

The likes of Global Influences and Sky Forces are already considered 'past the post' but visitors may have to do some research in other races.

However, the purists are focused on the Indian Produce Stakes and the RCTC Gold Vase the star attractions on the big day.

Trainer Bharath Singh's filly Sanaya (G. Vivek-up) is a strong fancy in the Produce Stakes, thanks to her good looks, solid preparations and fashionable bloodlines.

Adhiraj Singh Jodha's Golden Kingdom (Suraj Narredu), on the other hand, commands respect in the Gold Vase on his consistency in the highest class.

SELECTIONS

- 12 pm: Winter Star 1. Maginite 2. Cristaldo 3. 12.30 pm: Asagiri 1. Eagles Flight 2. Fulcrum 3. 1 pm: Madras Cheque 1. Oishika 2. Mathangi 3. 1.30 pm: Global Influence 1. Blinky Bill 2. Raffaeello 3. 2 pm: Norwegian Wood 1. True Faith 2. Sativur 3. 2.30 pm: Golden Kingdom 1. Ramiel 2. Trevalius 3. 3 pm: Sanaya 1. Pantazi 2. Multi Success 3. 3.30 pm: Key Star 1. Dona Sienna 2. Liban 3. 4 pm: Sky Force 1. Over The Line 2. Superlative 3.

US, Italy toy with opponents

Sydney: Inaugural champions the US and Italy handed out identical 3-0 thrashings to Croatia and France respectively, to top their groups and sail into the quarter-finals of the United Cup on Tuesday.

UNITED CUP

Taylor Fritz's 6-3, 6-2 win against Borna Coric in men's singles ensured the US, who meet China in the quarter-finals, topped Group A regardless of the outcome of the tie in the mixed team tournament. The big-hitting American converted his only break point of the first set in the seventh game and then served out the opener to surge ahead.

He capitalised on a double break to go 4-0 up and went

on to secure his maiden win against Coric in 91 minutes.

Coco Gauff was equally dominant in her 6-4, 6-2 win over Donna Vekic in women's singles.

Vekic upset Gauff at the Paris Olympics and went on to win the silver medal, but in Perth the American dictated terms as she secured the tie for her team even before the mixed doubles rubber.

After racing to a 4-1 lead in the first set, former US Open champion Gauff never really took her foot off the pedal. "I'm really happy with how I played today," Gauff said.

"She's a great player, and the Olympics loss hurt, so I definitely was thinking about it today as motivation to do better."



Jasmine Paolini of Italy who defeated Chloe Paquet of France to clinch the tie. (AP/PTI)

Gauff and Fritz were equally impressive in their mixed doubles win.

Earlier, Italy's Flavio Cobolli saved a match point to get the better of Frenchman Ugo

Humbert 3-6, 7-6 (10-8), 6-2 in Group D in Sydney.

Humbert won his first 17 service points in the second set and was serving for the match at 6-3, 5-4 before Cobolli produced a stunning comeback.

"It was a great battle to start the season. I'm really happy about the match," Cobolli said. "I think I played a really good match and also it was tough to come back (against) Ugo."

Italy clinched the tie with a match to spare when Jasmine Paolini swept aside Chloe Paquet 6-0, 6-2 in women's singles. The 2024 Roland Garros and Wimbledon finalist needed just an hour to wrap up her first win against Paquet, underlining the Italian's stellar form this year.

Reuters



R. Vaishali, in a picture posted on X

Vaishali advances, Humpy exits

New York: India grandmaster R Vaishali surprised herself with a stellar performance to enter the quarter-finals of the World Blitz Championship here, even as recently-crowned rapid champion Koneru Humpy made an early exit.

Following Humpy's win in Rapid, which earned her the gold medal and a prize of \$60,000, it was Vaishali's turn to impress her fans. She triumphed in the women's section, scoring 9.5 points out of a possible 11 with three draws.

"I'm very happy with my performance. Honestly, it (performance) was completely unexpected," she said. Vaishali will next face Chinese GM Zhu Jiner.

Russian Kateryna Lagno came closest to Vaishali, scoring 8.5 points, while the remaining six qualifiers finished with an identical eight points. Despite meeting the points criteria, Humpy was eliminated due to the tie-breaker, finishing ninth.

In the Open section, 10

players were tied for first place, including world No.1 Magnus Carlsen. The Norwegian scored when needed and drew six of his 13 games, finishing among the co-leaders at the end of the qualifiers.

WORLD BLITZ CHAMPIONSHIP

Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi won the qualifier with 9.5 points, benefiting from the best tiebreak, while Fabiano Caruana of the US finished second, ahead of Carlsen, who was placed third.

Surprisingly, none of the Indians made the top eight.

Arjun Erigaisi played brilliantly at the start, securing victories in the first five rounds but faded away to finish with a sub-par seven points. R Praggnanandhaa was the best-placed Indian, with 8.5 points, but a last-round loss to Russian Daniil Dubov cost him a spot in the quarter-finals.

PTI

Novak rules but Kyrgios falters

Brisbane: Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka began their season with straight-set wins but Nick Kyrgios' return to singles action did not go according to his plans at the Brisbane International here on Tuesday.

Djokovic tamed local favourite Rinky Hijikata 6-3, 6-3 in what was the top seeded Serbian's first tour-level singles match since October.

A day after his doubles victory alongside Kyrgios, Djokovic was precise with his serve and groundstrokes as he outlasted Hijikata to set up a second-round clash with Gael Monfils.

"I always expect myself to

do well on the court," Djokovic said. "To start off the new season with a win, it's very important."

BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL

Earlier, Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard fired 36 aces to beat Kyrgios 7-6 (7-2), 6-7 (4-7), 7-6 (7-3) in a battle of big servers at the Pat Rafter Arena.

The 21-year-old struck eight forehand winners in the first set alone and served a game of aces to go 5-4 ahead in the third in what was Kyrgios' first tour-level match since a wrist surgery in Sep-

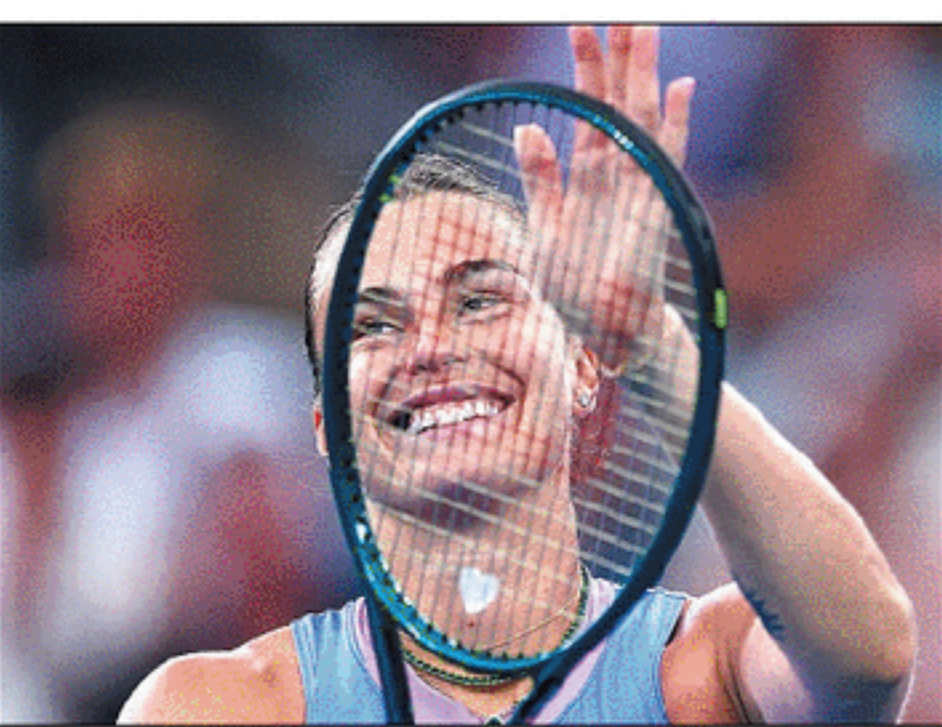
tember 2023.

Sabalenka shines

Women's world No.1 Sabalenka sent an ominous warning on her season debut with a 6-4, 6-0 demolition of Renata Zarazua. The Belarusian has been working on her new groundstrokes and Mexican Zarazua found herself on the firing line as Sabalenka reeled off 23 winners and won 71 per cent of her service points.

"The first match is always a tricky one," said Sabalenka, who is coming off a stellar season and will begin her quest for a third Australian Open title later this month.

Reuters



Aryna Sabalenka after defeating Renata Zarazua in Brisbane on Tuesday. (Getty Images)

Dismal United lose at home again, Chelsea upset

PREMIER LEAGUE	
MAN UNITED	0
NEWCASTLE	2
IPSWICH	2
CHELSEA	0

Manchester: Alexander Isak scored for the sixth straight Premier League game as Newcastle beat Manchester United 2-0 at Old Trafford to condemn Ruben Amorim's side to its worst home run in the top tier since the 1970s.

Relegation-threatened Ipswich beat Chelsea 2-0 to win at home for the first time this season, and Aston Villa and Brighton drew 2-2.

Newcastle's commanding display marked the first time since February 1979 that United have lost three home league games in a row. It was also the first time since 1962 that United have lost five league matches in the same calendar month.

Isak started the misery for home fans with his eighth goal in six matches. The Sweden striker put Newcastle ahead with a header after four minutes and Joelinton doubled the lead 15 minutes later when he rose above Lisandro Martinez to head in a second.

Isak had another effort disallowed after half an hour and Sandro Tonali hit the woodwork seconds later as Newcastle threatened to run riot.

Amorim withdrew Joshua Zirkzee for Kobbie Mainoo before halftime but United looked toothless — and clueless — in what was a dismal display.

"We suffered a goal and



Alexander Isak scores Newcastle United's first goal against Manchester United at Old Trafford on Monday. (Reuters)

then it was hard to come back," Amorim said. "They were the better team, plain and simple."

The defeat was the fifth in eight league games since Amorim joined from Sporting Lisbon in November and left United in 14th place, seven points above the relegation zone.

Newcastle are fifth and starting to entertain the possibility of a top-four finish.

"There is still a long way to go but the team is improving," Joelinton said. "Time will tell how good we are but we are enjoying football right now."

First home win
Chelsea started the day with

the best away record in the league after leaders Liverpool but they were trailing at Portman Road after just 12 minutes, thanks to a mistake from goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen.

The Scandinavian replaced Robert Sanchez in the Chelsea goal but he was adjudged to have fouled Liam Delap in the box and Delap got up to convert the penalty with aplomb.

Chelsea pushed forward in search of an equaliser but Ipswich doubled the lead early in the second half.

A poor pass from Axel Disasi allowed Delap to stretch the Chelsea defense and his pass set up Omari Hutchinson to score against his former club.

It was the first time this season that Chelsea have lost two games in a row.

They remain in fourth place after missing a chance to go above Arsenal and Nottingham Forest into second. It was the first home win in the Premier League for promoted Ipswich since 2002 and coach Kieran McKenna praised his side.

"It was everything it needed to be," McKenna said. "We defended, outstanding organization throughout the game."

"There has been hope in

the performances in general, we have been competing in almost every game. If you do that, you always have a chance."

Villa held

Aston Villa were unbeaten in their last eight games at Villa Park but went behind after just 12 minutes against a lively Brighton side.

With the Villa defence all at sea, Simon Adingra gathered a loose ball and curled a right-footed shot past Emiliano Martinez.

Villa came roaring back and got an equaliser in the 36th through birthday boy Ollie Watkins. The 29-year-old Watkins, who returned to the side to replace the suspended Jhon Duran, converted a penalty after Morgan Rogers was adjudged to have been fouled.

It was Rogers who put Villa in front early in the second half and once again Watkins was involved. His cute chip released Rogers, who chested the ball down and scored his sixth goal of the season.

However, Tariq Lamptey fired home with eight minutes left to give Brighton a share of the points.

The result leaves Villa in ninth and Brighton in 10th.

"We've been in that position a few times this season and we've failed to see it out," a disappointed Watkins said.

TODAY'S MATCH

● Brentford vs Arsenal, kick-off at 11pm IST.
Live on Star Sports Network, Disney+ Hotstar

Relegation is a possibility: Amorim

Manchester: Ruben Amorim called it "embarrassing" as a Manchester United manager to be discussing the threat of relegation, but after Monday's miserable 2-0 Premier League loss to Newcastle United he conceded that is the reality his team are facing.

"I think (relegation) is a possibility and we have to be clear with our fans. We have to change something but this season will be really hard on everybody," Amorim said.

"It's also my fault because I think the team has not improved. So it's a little bit embarrassing as United coach and to lose such a lot of games. But we have to cope with that, difficult moments in the life of everybody."

Amorim has had anything but a dream start to his United career, suffering five defeats in his first eight league games — the worst record for a Manchester United manager in 103 years.

There have been questions over Amorim's commitment to his tactical 3-4-3 approach.

The defensive issues that plagued former manager Erik ten Hag have haunted Amorim as well, with both goals on Monday coming largely thanks to blunders in the back line.

"Of course, I didn't choose the players specifically for that position, but that I already knew," Amorim said.

"But I understand that they have a lot of difficulties, because they spend two years playing one way, and then they are playing another, and with a lot of losses."

"But I have to sell my idea. I don't have another one."



A dejected Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim after the loss to Newcastle on Monday. (Reuters)



Robi Hansda celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner for Bengal in the Santosh Trophy final on Tuesday, in a picture posted on X

Robi takes Bengal to 33rd crown

SANTOSH TROPHY FINAL	
BENGAL	1
KERALA	0

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta: Bengal extended their supremacy in the Santosh Trophy with a 1-0 win over Kerala in the summit clash at the GMC Balayogi Athletic Stadium in Hyderabad on Tuesday. This was also Bengal's 33rd Santosh Trophy crown.

Robi Hansda scored the only goal of the game in the fourth minute of added time in the second half.

Robi found the back of the net with an easy finish from point-blank range after Aditya Thapa headed the ball into the box.

Both the sides have shown form befitting of their stature in the tournament, winning nine of their 10 matches, while drawing one each during their march to the title clash.

Historically, Bengal have

dominated at this stage. In recent times, however, seven-time winners Kerala have had the edge over their eastern rivals, winning the 2017-18 and the 2021-22 titles by defeating Bengal in the final.

State sports minister Aroop Biswas lauded the Bengal squad for their achievement.

So did Trinamul Congress national general secretary and MP Abhishek Banerjee.

"Bengal has once again etched its name in history by clinching the Santosh Trophy for a record 33rd time, defeating Kerala in a hard-fought final with a solitary goal by Robi Hansda."

This victory feels personal as six players from Diamond Harbour Football Club (DHFC) — Naro Hari Shrestha, Rabilal Mandi, Ayon Mondal, Supriya Pandit, Vishal Das and Suprodip Hazra — were part of the squad, with four of them featuring in today (Tuesday)'s match," Abhishek wrote on his X handle.

Barca lose another appeal

Barcelona: Barcelona have lost another appeal for the precautionary registration of Dani Olmo for the rest of the season on Monday, one day before the deadline to register the Spanish international.

Barcelona signed Olmo in August for around €55 million euros (\$57.22 million) but with the club unable to meet La Liga's wage cap, the attacking midfielder was registered for the first half of the season only.

The four-month allowance is set to expire at the end of the month.

The club managed to register Olmo after long-term injuries kept the first team players out of the squad for months, allowing Barca to allocate a



portion of their wages to register the 26-year-old, along with forward Pau Victor.

On Friday, the Commercial Court number 10 of Barcelona rejected the club's request to provisionally register Olmo, and the Court of First Instance number 47 of Barcelona has agreed with that ruling on Monday.

According to La Liga, the court rejected the precautionary registration of Olmo, since none of the necessary prerequisites for the adoption of the precautionary measure were met.

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